COVENANTAL CULMINATION:
WHY THE NEW COVENANT DOCUMENTS SIGNIFY THE CESSATION OF NORMATIVE POST-APOSTOLIC REVELATION

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by

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To Beall, my beloved wife.

May your relationship with God always be rooted in the sufficiency of Scripture.

What more can he say than to you he hath said?

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PREFACE

I know what it's like to yearn for the voice of God. After being saved at the age of 17, the first three years of my spiritual pilgrimage were marked by a desperation to hear God speak to me in a personal way. However, despite my earnest attempts to receive audible revelation from the Most High, I was always left disappointed. The longer I tried to hear God's voice, and failed to do so, the greater my feelings of spiritual worthlessness became. Despite all of my earliest Christian mentors insisting that I would eventually "learn" to discern God's voice from the voice inside my head, this skill has remained elusive to the present day. Nevertheless, through God's gracious providence and the biblical-theological education I began to receive at the age of 20, I came to a life changing realization. Namely, it is not a matter of *if* God speaks to the Christian in a personal way, but rather, *how* God speaks to the Christian in a personal way.

From the age of 17 to 20, I searched for God's voice in all the wrong places while simultaneously neglecting the clearest source in which God's voice can always be found: the Holy Bible. For the past nine years, I have wholeheartedly embraced the sufficiency of Scripture and have undoubtedly *heard* the voice of God through the words he has disclosed to us through his appointed human authors. Just as parents delight in making themselves known to their child, so also does God delight in allowing his beloved to know and enjoy him forever. Because he is a good father, the Almighty has established an objective means of self-revelation so that his people can always know the character and expectations of their God. In Scripture, the Creator has done everything to make himself known to the creature; where else could, or should, the believer go to hear from him in this life?

This thesis arises out of a desire to see Christians beholding their God, as he has personally revealed himself throughout the Holy Bible. It is my deepest conviction that a proper understanding of the intersection between covenant, canon, and the sign gift of prophecy will enable Christians to recognize *why* they should principally look to Scripture for the voice of God. As such, the purpose of this thesis is just as much for the spiritual edification and encouragement of the reader as it is to prove the validity of the conclusions contained herein. May God be pleased to use this composition to attain both of those ends.

I am grateful to have written this thesis under the supervision of Dr. Stephen Wellum, a man whose scholarship and piety are equally commendable. Furthermore, the editing suggestions offered by Mrs. Betsy Fredrick, Dr. Kyle Claunch, Dr. Robert Lyerly III, Dr. Chase Sears, and Dr. Lane Tipton have proven to be especially helpful throughout the production of this manuscript. I am also immensely grateful to the congregation of Emmanuel Reformed Baptist Church (SeaTac, Washington) for allowing me ample time to work on this thesis in conjunction with my regular ministry responsibilities. Moreover, numerous friends and family members were faithful to shower me with their prayers and support during the long process of finalizing this work. I count myself abundantly blessed to do life with such a tremendous support system. Lastly, this thesis could not have been written without the unwavering support and encouragement of my wife, Beall. It is to her that I have dedicated this work, and I pray she will see the finished product as the fruit of her patience with my journey as a seminarian.

Soli Deo Gloria.

Dewey Andrew Dovel

SeaTac, Washington

May 2025

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of the covenant is foundational to understanding the theology of Scripture.[1] Throughout church history, myriads of Christians have shared this conviction, and as a result there is no shortage of available literature on the biblical covenants.[2] However, one of the most overlooked distinctives of covenant is its inextricable relationship to the biblical canon, and how that relationship should impact the way Christians perceive special revelation during the New Covenant epoch.

According to a 2020 study conducted by Todd Johnson and Gina Zurlo of Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, approximately 644 million people in the world self-identify as "Spirit-Empowered Christians."[3] Stated differently, approximately 644 million people believe, at least to some extent, that the sign gifts of the Holy Spirit remain

[1] Charles H. Spurgeon, "The Wondrous Covenant," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1912), 58:517.

[2] For a robust treatment of the development of covenant theology during the Patristic era of church history, see J. Ligon Duncan, "The Covenant Idea in Ante-Nicene Theology" (PhD diss., The University of Edinburgh, 1995), 21–95. For an overview of interactions with covenant theology during the Middle Ages, see Jennifer A. Harris, "Enduring Covenant in the Christian Middle Ages," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 44, no. 4 (2009): 563–86. An overarching representation of the Reformed perspective on covenant theology is delineated by Geerhardus Vos in his essay, "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1980), 234–67. For a Baptistic treatment of the history of covenant theology, see Nehemiah Coxe and John Owen, *Covenant Theology from Adam to Christ*, ed. Ronald D. Miller, James M. Renihan, and Francisco Orozco (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic, 2005).

[3] Todd Johnson and Gina Zurlo, "Have Pentecostals Outgrown Their Name?," Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, April 22, 2021, https://www.gordonconwell.edu/news/have-pentecostals-outgrown-their-name/. In the context of this study, the designation "Spirit-Empowered Christian" simply refers to a self-identifying Christian who believes in the perpetuity of the sign gifts of the Holy Spirit. Although there appears to be debate amongst "Spirit-Empowered Christians" on whether the gift of apostle extends beyond the first century, those within this theological category would affirm the continuation of the sign gifts of prophecy, speaking in tongues, and healing.

in operation during the post-apostolic era of redemptive history.[4] Practically, this means that *hundreds of millions* of people believe that God continues to provide special revelation to his people, and that Christians should *expect* to hear God speaking directly to them in supplementation to how he speaks through Scripture.[5] Although debate exists as to whether differing levels of authority are associated with God's special revelation, the subsequent chapters of this thesis will argue that all of God's special revelation is *normative*.[6] That is to say, when God speaks in verbal or written form, there is never an excuse for his special revelation to be dismissed or disregarded by man (Ps 19:7; 2 Tim 3:16–17). God's special revelation is always authoritatively binding (i.e., normative) upon his image bearers who receive it (Deut 4:2; Heb 4:12–13), and man always has a fundamental obligation to listen and obey when God speaks (Josh 1:7–9; Jas 1:19–25).

In past generations, those who questioned the normative nature of special revelation were generally confined to Christian denominations that fell under the label "Charismatic."[7] However, as recently noted by C. Douglas Weaver, Baptistic

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[4] It would be naïve and presumptuous to assume that every person who identifies as a "Spirit-Empowered Christian" shares *absolute continuity of understanding* on how the sign gifts should be experienced throughout the New Covenant epoch. The central purpose for citing this estimation is to demonstrate that there are a plethora of Christians who expect *some continuity of experience* between how the gifts of the Holy Spirit were manifested during the apostolic age, and how they will be manifested throughout every subsequent era of church history.

[5] John MacArthur provides numerous examples of how contemporary "Spirit-Empowered Christians" have expressed their understanding of the continuation of the sign gifts of the Holy Spirit in *Strange Fire: The Danger of Offending the Holy Spirit with Counterfeit Worship* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013). Although a popular level book that was penned nearly a decade ago, this publication provides a clear illustration of pertinent pneumatological convictions espoused by modern Christian leaders and laypersons. MacArthur's commentary in chap. 6, and the associated citations recorded in the Index section, is most relevant to the topics discussed throughout this research thesis.

[6] In subsequent chaps. this concept of normative special revelation will be developed extensively, particularly regarding (1) how special revelation relates to covenant and canon; (2) how Christians should understand special revelation in the post-apostolic era of church history (~AD 100–present).

[7] James K. A. Smith lists several elements that comprise a "Charismatic" worldview in chap. 2 of his book *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 17–47. Of the elements explicitly cited, Smith notes that "radical openness to God"—of

denominations have witnessed a growing surge of "Charismatic" distinctives over the past century.[8]

How have Baptists responded to the continual rise of the "Charismatic," "Spirit-Empowered" movement within their own tribe? In some instances, Baptist theologians have done outstanding work in making a case for the cessation of the sign gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially in reference to the cessation of normative special revelation to the post-apostolic church.[9] Nevertheless, the *intersection* of covenant, canon, and the cessation of normative post-apostolic revelation is a biblical-theological connection waiting to be explored by Christian theologians at large, and Baptist theologians in particular. There is a considerable need for Baptists to produce literature that not only surveys the biblical-theological reasons why God no longer regularly provides his people with special revelation, but also details the necessary apologetical and polemical implications that stem from this observation. For the glory of God, this thesis will delve into these unchartered waters and fill this noticeable void in Baptistic scholarship.

Familiarity with the Literature

Given the immeasurable attention that covenant, canon, and cessationism have received throughout church history, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to opine on *every* work that has been produced on these subjects.[10] Although there will be over 300

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which includes ongoing special revelation—is a staple of "Charismatic" theology, particularly within Pentecostal traditions (33–38).

[8] Clarence Douglas Weaver, *Baptists and the Holy Spirit: The Contested History with Holiness-Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement* (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2019).

[9] Some of the most recent Baptistic treatments on this subject can be found in the following volumes: Wayne A. Grudem, ed., *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011); Robert L. Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts: A Verse-by-Verse Study of 1 Corinthians 12–14* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999); Samuel E. Waldron, *To Be Continued? Are the Miraculous Gifts for Today?* (Greenville, SC: Calvary, 2015); Thomas R. Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts: What They Are & Why They Matter* (Nashville: B & H, 2018).

[10] All references to "cessationism" in this section are specifically geared toward the cessation of normative post-apostolic revelation. As stated in the introduction, this thesis is not seeking to defend

pertinent sources cited throughout the development of each subsequent chapter, it would be naïve to presume that this thesis will exhaust the totality of how covenant, canon, and cessationism has been understood. Nevertheless, in keeping with the principal objective of this thesis, it is imperative to provide a smorgasbord of how covenant, canon, and cessationism are represented by contemporary Baptistic theologians.[11] While it is true that theologians residing within non-Baptistic denominations have made formidable contributions to these topics, and while this thesis will make repeated use of their scholarship, there is a need for increased awareness of what Baptists believe about covenant, canon, and cessationism.

Stated differently, if Baptistic Christians are to improve in their ability to understand, explain, and defend how the intersection of covenant and canon necessitates the cessation of normative post-apostolic revelation, there must *first* be cognizance of the way in which Baptists contemplate these issues.[12] Thus, to generate familiarity with literature that is germane to a Baptistic understanding of covenant, canon, and

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cessationism *per se*, but rather the cessation of God's provision of special revelation during the new covenant epoch of redemptive history. This contention will be further elaborated in the following chapters, especially in chaps. 3 and 4. Moreover, while preliminary treatments of "covenant" and "canon" will be offered in this section, a more detailed interaction with these concepts will be provided in chaps. 2 and 3.

[11] It would be overly simplistic to assume that "Baptistic" theologians have shared absolute unanimity of views on doctrine and practice. Nevertheless, Anthony L. Chute, Nathan A. Finn, and Michael A. G. Haykin identify five distinctives that have undergirded "Baptistic" churches over the past five centuries in *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement* (Nashville: B & H, 2015): "(1) regenerate church membership" (330–33); "(2) believer's baptism" (333–36); "(3) congregational polity" (336–39); "(4) local church autonomy" (339–42); "(5) religious freedom" (342–44). Thus, throughout the duration of the thesis, any references to people, terms, or concepts described as "Baptist/Baptistic" can be broadly associated with each of these five characteristics.

[12] As soon as Christians are asked what they believe, in reference to their faith or worldview, they are immediately tasked with offering a reasoned defense (apologetic) of their beliefs. The Word of God calls every Christian, to at least *some* extent, to (1) know what they believe; (2) know why they believe what they believe; and (3) graciously provide a reasoned defense of their beliefs when engaging with competing convictions or worldviews (Matt 28:18–20; 1 Pet 3:14–16; Jude 1:3). Therefore, if faced with the question of how the intersection of covenant and canon necessitates the cessation of normative post-apostolic revelation, Christians of all denominations are called to think critically about how to best address this inquiry. Regardless of the simplicity or difficulty of a subject, the biblical expectation is for Christians to think diligently about *how they should think* about it.

cessationism, a consultation of fifteen seminal works is in order. As will be seen in the next section, the literature referenced will canvass how five of the most prominent inter-Baptistic circles have thought about covenant, canon, and the cessation of normative post-apostolic revelation.[13] Namely, Dispensational Baptists,[14] Progressive Dispensational Baptists,[15] Progressive Covenantal Baptists,[16] New Covenant Theology

[13] In the context of this thesis, it would be impossible to delve into every distinctive held by Baptists who self-identify with Dispensationalism, Progressive Dispensationalism, New Covenant Theology, Progressive Covenantalism, and Particular Baptist Theology. What is more, there are certainly Baptistic systems of theology that do not seamlessly fit into any of these given categories and as a result will not receive attention at this juncture. The works cited in conjunction with each of these *most recognizable* Baptistic groups are meant to introduce the reader to their central tenets of doctrine and point the reader to viable resources for further study.

[14] Clarence Bass identifies *at least* six distinguishing features of Dispensationalism. Although there can be some fluidity of views, Bass argues that the following traits are *broadly* applicable to self-identifying Dispensationalists in *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism: Its Historical Genesis and Ecclesiastical Implications* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960): (1) a commitment to literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutics (21–24); (2) a sharp distinction between Israel and the church (24–27); (3) the church seen as a parenthesis in God's redemptive-historical plan for Israel, to be resumed after the future pre-tribulation rapture (27–29); (4) a pre-tribulation rapture of the church (1 Thess 4:13–17) (38–40); (5) a Jewish-centered, seven year great tribulation period (Dan 9:24–27; Matt 24:15–28) (41–43); and (6) a future, Jewish-centered millennial reign of Jesus Christ on the earth (Rev 20:1–6) (43–45).

[15] Michael J. Vlach states that *at least* six essential beliefs comprise the framework of Progressive Dispensationalism in *Dispensationalism: Essential Beliefs and Common Myths* (Los Angeles: Theological Studies, 2017): "(1) the primary meaning of any Bible passage is found in that passage. The New Testament does not transcend Old Testament passages in a way that overrides or cancels the original authorial intent of the Old Testament writers" (31–35); "(2) types exist in the Bible, but national Israel is not an inferior type superseded by the church" (35–40); "(3) Israel and the church are distinct entities; the church is not to be regarded or identified as the new and/or true Israel" (41–43); "(4) while there is spiritual unity in salvation between Jews and Gentiles, there is still a unique, future role for Israel as a nation in God's eschatological purposes" (43–46); "(5) the nation of Israel will be both saved and restored with a unique functional element in a future earthly millennial kingdom" (46–48); "(6) because there are multiple senses of "seed of Abraham," the church's identification as "seed of Abraham" does not cancel God's promises to the believing Jewish "seed of Abraham" (48–50).

[16] For a sample of the macrolevel *modus operandi* of Progressive Covenantalism, Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum emphasize *at least* six fundamental elements in their volume, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018). They write, "(1) the Bible presents a plurality of covenants that progressively reveal God's one redemptive plan, which reaches its fulfillment and terminus in Christ and the new covenant" (35); "(2) each biblical covenant, then, contributes to God's unified plan, and to comprehend 'the whole counsel of God' (Acts 20:27), we understand each covenant in its own context by locating that covenant in relation to what precedes and follows it" (35); "(3) the biblical covenants are not divided into two categories: the covenant of works and covenant of grace. Rather, God's one eternal plan unfolds in history through a plurality of interrelated covenants" (36); "(4) God has one people, yet there is an Israel-church distinction due to their respective redemptive-historical covenants" (36); "(5) we must think of the Israel-Church relationship Christologically.

Baptists,[17] and Particular Baptists.[18] Reflective interaction with these works will underscore areas of continuity and discontinuity within the broader Baptistic umbrella,

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The church is not directly the 'new Israel' or her replacement. Rather, in Christ Jesus, the Church is God's new creation, composed of believing Jews and Gentiles" (36); "(6) in contrast to Israel, the church—as God's new covenant-new creation people—is constituted now as a believing, regenerate people, although we await the fullness of what Christ inaugurated at his glorious return" (36–37).

[17] Although the work is self-published, Steve Lehrer's *New Covenant Theology* exhibits continuity with prominent Baptistic adherents to New Covenant Theology and arguably represents the most comprehensive treatment on this theological system. Steve Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology: Questions Answered* (n.p., 2006), 19–20. According to Lehrer, *at least* seven headings organize New Covenant Theology: "(1) The Cross: by His death on the cross, Jesus purchased both complete forgiveness of sins past, present, and future as well as a changed life or new heart for all those for whom He died" (19); "(2) The Abrahamic Covenant: the Abrahamic covenant reveals God's plan to save a people and take them into His land" (19); "(3) Old Covenant: the Old or Mosaic covenant is a legal or works covenant that God made with Israel on Mount Sinai. This covenant is brought to an end and is fulfilled at the cross. It was never intended to save people, but instead its purpose was to increase sin and guilt until the coming of the Savior. Israel, under the Mosaic covenant, was the physical fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant" (19); "(4) New Covenant: the new covenant was inaugurated through Jesus's death on the cross so that all those for whom he died would receive full forgiveness of their sins. The new covenant is the spiritual fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant" (19); "(5) Israel and the Church: Israel in the old covenant era was a temporary, unbelieving picture of the true people of God, the Church. There always existed a small remnant of believers within unbelieving Israel. When Jesus Christ came, the picture of the people of God gave way to the true people of God consisting of both Jews and Gentiles" (20); "(6) Law: the version of law in the old covenant era was the Mosaic Law, which included the Ten Commandments. The Mosaic Law has passed away with the coming of Christ and the new covenant. . . . The version of the law in the new covenant era is the Law of Christ, which includes the commands of Christ that pertain to the new covenant era and the commands of His Apostles" (20); "(7) Circumcision and Baptism: under the old covenant, circumcision was the physical picture of regeneration. It signified that a person was physically born into the unbelieving people of God, Israel. It was given to all Israelites irrespective of repentance and faith. Under the new covenant, baptism is the outward sign that regeneration has occurred. It signifies that you have been spiritually born into the believing people of God, the Church. It is given to all those who give evidence of regeneration, which is repentance and faith" (20).

[18] Phillip D. R. Griffiths conveys Particular Baptist theology through *at least* five unique observations in *Covenant Theology: A Reformed Baptist Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016): "(1) since the fall, all humanity has been under God's curse and sentence of death" (189); "(2) from shortly after the fall of the first man God's kingdom has been advancing as men and women have embraced the promised Messiah. All men sinned in Adam, and many are made alive in the second Adam" (189); "(3) to facilitate the Messiah's work, God provided a particular nation (Israel) with an explicit revelation of his righteous requirements in the Mosaic Law. The intention was not to provide an alternative way of salvation, but, rather, to, in the despair it generated, to encourage fallen man to believe in the one remedy for sin, namely Jesus Christ; the one to both the law and the prophets bore witness" (189); "(4) Ultimately, excepting the covenant of redemption, there has only been two primary covenants, namely the covenant of works that Adam broke and the new covenant in Christ. By birth we are all under the first covenant. However, by spiritual rebirth many are under the new covenant, because the second Adam has succeeded where the first failed" (189); "(5) all the saved have been participants in the new covenant. In the Old Testament, Christ was revealed through the promise; a promise that was ratified in his shed blood and resurrection from the dead. Even before this covenant's ratification men and woman, who believed like Abraham, were included in the blessings of the new covenant" (189–90).

thereby establishing a foundation for this thesis to build on in the chapters to come.

Covenant

With the publication of John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue's *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*, Dispensational Baptists received a *magnum opus* for their theological inquiry.[19] Spanning over 1,000 pages, this volume epitomizes a comprehensive treatment of dogmatic theology from a robustly Dispensational perspective. Even though the biblical and theological basis for the covenants of redemption, works, and grace is rejected,[20] this book provides an expansive overview of the Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Priestly, Davidic, and new covenants.[21] Despite rightly noting that "covenants are central to God's plans and constitute the vehicles through which God's kingdom purposes unfold,"[22] in addition to briefly defining *covenant* as "a formal agreement or treaty between two parties with obligations and regulations,"[23] there is an absence of intensive word study, theological development, and research into how the concept of covenant would have been understood in extra-biblical contexts.

Although published roughly seven years before MacArthur and Mayhue's tome, Robert L. Saucy's *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface between Dispensational & Non-Dispensational Theology* still encompasses one of the most acclaimed apologetics for Progressive Dispensational Baptists.[24] From start to

[19] John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017).

[20] MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 465, 870–71.

[21] MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 871–80.

[22] MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 870.

[23] MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 870.

[24] Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface between Dispensational & Non-Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993). Another prominent

finish, this treatise clarifies how "covenant . . . constitutes the root of all salvation,"[25] and delves into significant detail in the exposition of the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New covenants.[26] Whereas Saucy provides more data to the reader on the aforementioned covenants than MacArthur and Mayhue's *Biblical Doctrine*, he does not offer substantial treatment of the Noahic or Mosaic covenants. Furthermore, this literary work does not unpack the covenants of redemption, works, or grace.

Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum's *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* is an immensely important work produced thus far into the twenty-first century.[27] Even if readers do not agree with every conclusion reached by the authors, they will surely be grateful for the thorough and meticulous scholarship devoted to expounding how the doctrine of covenant undergirds the totality of Scripture. The volume is divided into three parts, and each section organically builds off one another. Section 1 details the importance of covenant in biblical and systematic theology, tying in key hermeneutical connotations that impact how Dispensationalists and Covenantalists perceive covenant in their respective frameworks. Section 2 plumbs the depths of every biblical covenant within their redemptive-historical context, while section 3 teases out how covenant theology has direct application to the kingdom of God and the Christian life. The book also features an insightful lexical analysis of how *covenant* is employed throughout the Bible, in supplementation to how the concept of covenant was understood in extra-biblical contexts throughout the ancient near east. Gentry and Wellum both affirm the prevalence of a "creation covenant," which

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resource to consult for encountering how Progressive Dispensationalists reflect on covenant theology is Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: BridgePoint, 2000). Both works epitomize the central components of Progressive Dispensationalism's theology of the biblical covenants.

[25] Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 41.

[26] Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 39–139.

[27] Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*.

functions for them the same way the "covenant of works" has functioned for covenant theology.[28] Although the explicit terminology "covenant of works" and "covenant of grace" is not championed throughout this work, progressive covenantalism's view of the creation covenant is similar to "the covenant of works." The main difference with covenant theology is over the *use* of "the covenant of grace" and how it functions in one's understanding of the overall covenantal storyline of Scripture. These modifications of Paedobaptist covenant theology render a unique variance of Reformed Baptistic covenant theology.

Despite its "recent development [as a theological system in America]," New Covenant Theology has found a home within Baptistic denominations.[29] According to Gary D. Long, New Covenant Theology is a theological framework that has great diversity amongst its adherents, which has ultimately led to significant confusion regarding how New Covenant Theology should be understood.[30] Thus, Long's book-length treatment focuses on providing clarification around the definition of New Covenant Theology,[31] the central themes/characteristics of New Covenant Theology,[32] and how New Covenant Theology is fundamentally distinct from the covenant theology expressed in the Reformed confessions.[33] These objectives are accomplished over the span of six chapters and a

[28] Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 414–20.

[29] Gary D. Long, *New Covenant Theology: Time for a More Accurate Way* (Colorado Springs: CreateSpace, 2013), 1.

[30] Long, *New Covenant Theology*, 1–2.

[31] According to Long's definition in chap. 1, New Covenant Theology can be defined as "God's eternal purpose progressively revealed in the commandments and promises of the biblical covenants of the OT and fulfilled in the New Covenant of Jesus Christ." Long, *New Covenant Theology*, 2.

[32] In Long, *New Covenant Theology*, the central themes of New Covenant Theology are expounded on pp. 2–3, whereas the primary characteristics are depicted on pp. 4–9.

[33] As reflected in Long, *New Covenant Theology*, the differences between New Covenant Theology and Reformed covenant theology are summarized on pp. 10–19. The distinctions drawn between New Covenant Theology and Reformed covenant theology are further elucidated by Long in chaps. 3–6.

glossary of theological terms. Long's robust articulation of New Covenant Theology and his convictions about its chief differences with Reformed covenant theology are noteworthy strengths of this book. However, Long's work does not include much critical exchange with the primary sources of those who subscribe to competing systems of covenant theology.

In Pascal Denault's, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology: A Comparison Between Seventeenth-Century Particular Baptist and Paedobaptist Federalism*, the covenant theology of the Particular Baptist tradition is brought to light within its unique historical context. Denault's rich documentation of primary sources accentuates how prominent sixteenth and seventeenth century Paedobaptist and Credobaptist theologians rigorously debated the inextricable relationship between covenant theology, baptism, and church membership.[34] Moreover, Denault's transparent portrait of how Particular Baptist theologians have confessed the doctrine of the covenant is useful for accurately discerning the foundational contours of this tradition.[35] Namely, the affirmation of the covenant of works and its broader situation within the old covenant,[36] salvation given *under* the Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants but not

[34] Pascal Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology: A Comparison Between Seventeenth-Century Particular Baptist and Paedobaptist Federalism*, trans. Mac Wigfield and Elizabeth Wigfield (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian, 2013), 9–23.

[35] Speaking in continuity with the historical consensus amongst Particular Baptist theologians, Denault observes,

> Covenant theology is the study of the different covenants that God has made with man since the beginning of the world. The connection between God and the creature of his making, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, has always been defined in terms of covenants having different goals and terms. Since biblical history occurs entirely within these covenants, it is imperative to understand their nature and their role in order to correctly interpret the Scriptures. Consequently, covenant theology provides a context which allows for an understanding of the global structure of the plan of redemption by making the distinction between the parts and the whole and by explaining how these parts insert themselves into the whole. (Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 23)

[36] Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 30–33.

through those covenants,[37] and the covenant of grace progressively revealed from the fall until its full revelation and consummation in the New covenant.[38] All in all, Denault's treatment of Particular Baptist Covenant Theology is well-steeped in historical and systematic theology despite the brevity of this volume.

Canon

Over the duration of his ministry, Charles Ryrie produced several literary works that continue to shape Dispensationalists in the present. In his publication *A Survey of Bible Doctrine*, Ryrie provides a synthesis of numerous doctrines that are fundamental to orthodox Christianity. In the chapter on bibliology, one of Ryrie's central points of emphasis is on the meaning, tests, and formation of the canon of Scripture.[39] He succinctly defines canon as "[a] rule or measuring rod, and in relation to the Bible it refers to the collection of books which passed a test of authenticity and authority."[40] Moreover, Ryrie goes into great detail explicating the tests used throughout redemptive history to recognize and receive the literature that comprise the sixty-six-book canon of Scripture.[41] However, despite placing this chapter of his work immediately after the section on theology proper, Ryrie does not demonstrate how the doctrine of God directly influences a Protestant concept of canon, nor does he survey how God's canonical revelation is the culmination of his covenant relationships with his people.[42]

[37] Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 70–71.

[38] Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 61–67.

[39] Charles C. Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* (Chicago: Moody, 1972), 42–47.

[40] Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine*, 42–43.

[41] Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine*, 53–57.

[42] Chaps. 2 and 3 of this thesis emphasize how theology proper directly impacts the understanding of the biblical canon, in addition to highlighting canon as the redemptive-historical culmination of God's covenantal interactions with his people. As stated in those chapters, there is an organic progression from God *in se,* to God's covenant dealings with man, to the eventual concretizing of covenantal documents that comprise the Old and New Testament canon of Scripture.

Within fifty years of Ryrie's publication of *A Survey of Bible Doctrine*, members of the Dallas Theological Seminary faculty produced another noteworthy treatment on dogmatic theology. In the Exploring Christian Theology series, editors Nathan D. Holsteen and Michael J. Svigel oversee a three-volume, systematic engagement with core biblical doctrines.[43] Although the faculty of Dallas Theological Seminary has largely shifted from Dispensationalism to Progressive Dispensationalism in recent years,[44] there remains substantial overlap in convictions pertaining to canon. As evidenced in volume 1, *Exploring Christian Theology: Revelation, Scripture, and the Triune God*, careful attention is devoted to accurately depicting the historical formation and reception of the biblical canon.[45] The contributors are candid in noting the tensions that arose through the church's identification of the sixty-six-book canon, but are likewise resolute in affirming the absolute trustworthiness of Scripture as the Word of God.[46] Nevertheless, as was similarly observable from Ryrie's work, this resource does not develop the intersection between theology proper, covenant, and canon.

From a Progressive Covenantal lens, Matthew Barrett's treatment of canon in *Canon, Covenant, and Christology* is firmly entrenched in God's covenantal dealings with

[43] Nathan D. Holsteen and Michael J. Svigel, eds., *Revelation, Scripture, and the Triune God*, vol. 1 of *Exploring Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2014); Nathan D. Holsteen and Michael J. Svigel, eds., *Creation, Fall, and Salvation*, vol. 2 of *Exploring Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2015); Nathan D. Holsteen and Michael J. Svigel, eds., *The Church, Spiritual Growth, and the End Times*, vol. 3 of *Exploring Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2014).

[44] For deeper insight regarding the transition of Dallas Theological Seminary from Dispensationalism to Progressive Dispensationalism, see Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, eds., *Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church: The Search for Definition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*.

[45] The development and recognition of the biblical canon is explored by Douglas K. Blount et al., "Part One: How Firm a Foundation: Revelation, Scripture, and Truth," in Holsteen and Svigel, *Revelation, Scripture, and the Triune God*, 79–98.

[46] Blount et al., "Part One: How Firm a Foundation," 101–5.

humanity.[47] Based on the entirety of chapter 2, titled "The Book of the Covenant and Canon Consciousness," it is clear that Barrett has ascertained the interrelatedness between the redemptive-historical establishment of divine-human covenants and the ensuing production of canonical documents that attest to those covenants.[48] Due to Barrett's recognition of the intersection between covenant and canon, he is able to thoughtfully explore the organic process in which God discloses special revelation to humanity. Namely, (1) God's special revelation to humanity is inherently covenantal[49]; (2) God's covenantal revelation to his people is progressively unfolded throughout the span of biblical history, culminating in the person and work of Jesus Christ[50]; and (3) the

[47] Matthew Barrett, *Canon, Covenant and Christology: Rethinking Jesus and the Scriptures of Israel* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020). Over the past few years there has been some speculation as to whether Barrett would still identify himself under the broader umbrella of Progressive Covenantalism. In the process of writing this thesis, I personally reached out to Barrett via e-mail to confirm where he stood on this subject. However, to date, I have not received a response to his inquiry. Thus, due to the lack of a public retraction of previous self-characterizations, this thesis associates Barrett with Progressive Covenantalism.

[48] Barrett, *Canon, Covenant and Christology*, 41–96.

[49] Barrett summarizes the covenantal nature of God's special revelation in the following way:

> From the efficacy of God's speech-act at creation to the initial covenant promises made to Abraham to the delivery of God's written word at Sinai to the prophetic word before, during and after exile, [the people of God] are to understand the word of God, communicated orally and in writing, as nothing other than the divine discourse that brought them into existence and instructed them in the way of covenant blessing. (Barrett, *Canon, Covenant and Christology,* 42)

Barrett continues to elaborate this contention throughout pp. 42 and 44.

[50] According to Barrett, drawing heavily from the biblical theology of Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949),

> revelation comes through redemption progressively, then the covenantal pattern of that redemptive revelation has a threefold tapestry: (1) God is not silent but reveals himself for the purpose of redemption and often does so in redemptive history itself through certain covenant promises he makes to his people (through not exclusively through the medium of covenant promises). . . . This initial word revelation is habitual, as is evident in the redemptive-covenantal promises God makes to Adam in Genesis 3:15, Abraham in Genesis 15 and 17, Moses in Exodus 20 and following, David in 2 Samuel 7, and so on. (2) Generally, [God's] covenantal word of promise is then followed by divine *actions* that demonstrate the credibility of God's word. . . . Yahweh's mighty acts (in redemptive-history) vindicate his covenant promises. (3) God not only acts on his covenant word of promise (word-*act* revelation), but he then provides the official, authoritative interpretation of his actions, leaving no hermeneutical ambiguity (word-act-*word* revelation). . . . In short, God is his own interpreter. Those who are the recipients of his covenantal word-act revelation are not left to themselves to decipher or speculate what his mighty acts mean: God himself speaks to interpret his mighty acts so that there is

progressive, covenantal revelation of God to man—from the covenant in Eden to the final (new) covenant established in Christ's blood—is the means God uses to create and govern His covenant people.[51] Barrett's insightful observations are further punctuated by showing how the concept of canon is a necessary conclusion of how ancient near eastern people understood covenant during biblical times.[52]

When reflecting on Baptistic works in New Covenant Theology, D. A. Carson's *Collected Writings on Scripture* will function as a sample of what New Covenant Theology adherents would broadly epitomize in their beliefs about canon.[53] For Carson, word-act revelation constitutes the way in which God's special revelation is orally delivered to humanity and is later validated through divine activity in creation.[54] In other words,

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> no doubt as to the fulfillment of his covenantal word. His authoritative interpretation is the hermeneutical key to understanding how his mighty acts fulfill his covenant promises. Apart from that interpretive word, God's people have no authoritative interpretation of the supernatural and providential events they have experienced. (Barrett, *Canon, Covenant and Christology*, 45–46)

In addition to the aforementioned citation, Barrett provides substantial elaboration on this "threefold tapestry" of God's progressive, covenantal revelation throughout pp. 44–47.

[51] Barrett highlights how God utilizes the Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic (Old), Davidic, and new covenants to create and govern his people. Barrett, *Canon, Covenant and Christology*, 48–96. In accordance with God's providence, each of these biblical covenants served a particular purpose in setting the stage for the Messiah to come in the fullness of times, in order that God's eternal plan of redemption would be accomplished on behalf of his covenant people (Gal 4:4–5).

[52] Barrett, *Canon, Covenant and Christology*, 54–63, 73–79. Although the Ancient Near East is a historical context that is foreign to many twenty-first century Westerners, the richness of the biblical covenants can be overlooked without having some awareness of the similarities and differences between God's covenantal dealings with his people, and how covenants were regarded within extra-biblical contexts. This motif will be further examined in chap. 2 of this thesis.

[53] When considered holistically, Carson's theological convictions would broadly fall under each of the distinctives that have undergirded "Baptistic" churches over the past five centuries: (1) regenerate church membership; (2) believer's baptism; (3) congregational polity; (4) local church autonomy; (5) religious freedom. See Chute, Finn, and Haykin, *The Baptist Story*, 330–45. Thus, in this respect, Carson is "Baptistic." Moreover, although Carson has admitted he is hesitant to self-identify as an advocate of New Covenant Theology, he was asked to write a chapter of a Festschrift on the subject of New Covenant Theology due to "many [perceiving him] to be a new covenant theologian, a partisan of that camp." See D. A. Carson, "New Covenant Theology and Biblical Theology," in *God's Glory Revealed in Christ: Essays on Biblical Theology in Honor of Thomas R. Schreiner*, ed. Denny Burk, James Hamilton, and Brian Vickers (Nashville: B & H, 2019), 17–31.

[54] D. A. Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 19–26.

"although Scripture describes God's speaking through human beings, the only access we have to such phenomena during the period of history embraced by Scripture is found in Scripture."[55] At this point, Carson's conclusions are strikingly similar to what was noted from Barrett in the preceding paragraph.

For years, James R. White has been recognized as an accomplished Christian apologist and is arguably the most well-known Particular Baptist theologian in the world.[56] His treatise, *Scripture Alone*, is a formative work on bibliology, providing clarification on the biblical, theological, and historical underpinnings of the canon of Scripture.[57] White's articulation of canon as "an authoritative list of something, such as all the books . . . of Scripture" is in keeping with how canon is understood across multi-denominational lines.[58] What is more, White posits a unique duality for how canon should be perceived: canon[1] is the divine knowledge and understanding of the canon, whereas canon[2] is the human knowledge and understanding of the canon.[59] This duality of perspective on canon is

[55] Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture*, 26.

[56]James R. White's credentials as a Particular Baptist apologist include engaging in more than 175 moderated, public debates with leading proponents of Roman Catholicism, Islam, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Mormonism, as well as critics of Christianity such as Bart Ehrman, John Dominic Crossan, Marcus Borg, and John Shelby Spong. For more on James R. White, see "James White," Alpha & Omega Ministries, accessed December 22, 2021, https://www.aomin.org/aoblog/about/.

[57] James R. White, *Scripture Alone* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2004), 98–119.

[58] White, *Scripture Alone*, 100.

[59] Consider a more detailed explanation of White's canon[1] and canon[2] duality:

> The canon is an *artifact of revelation,* not an object of revelation itself. It is known infallibly to God by necessity and to man with a certainty directly related to God's purpose in giving the Word to the church. The canon exists because God has inspired *some* writings, not *all* writings. It is known to man in fulfillment of God's purpose in engaging in the action of inspiration so as to give to His people a lamp for their feet and a light for their path. The canon, then, has two aspects as we consider it in light of its relationship to God's overall purpose in giving the Scriptures. The first aspect, to which I will refer as canon[1], is the *divine* knowledge and understanding of the canon. The second aspect, which I will identify as canon[2], is the *human* knowledge and understanding of the canon (which has been the primary focus of debate down through the centuries). Hopefully, through this differentiation, we will be able to see through the fallacious arguments that far too often cloud the subject of the canon of Scripture. (White, *Scripture Alone*, 101)

White's attempt to resolve the conundrum of how man's reception of the sixty-six-book Bible throughout history is not arbitrary in light of God's eternal purposes in revealing himself through special revelation.[60] In this respect, White recognizes the integral role that theology proper has in formulating a distinctively Christian understanding of canon, and how the canon was gradually received by God's people over the ages.

Cessationism

John Walvoord's *The Holy Spirit: A Comprehensive Study of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit* represents a Baptistic Dispensational understanding of the cessation of the gift of prophecy. In this volume, Walvoord classifies the gift of prophecy under the heading "temporary spiritual gifts," and proceeds to organize this portion of his work under the following sub-headings: (1) the extent of the gift of prophecy[61]; (2) characteristics of

[60] White emphasizes the objectivity that the canon^1—canon^2 distinction establishes when analyzing the reality of canon in the mind of God, and the redemptive-historical reception of canon by his people:

> Once we realize that *it is Scripture, not man's knowledge of the canon, that is inspired,* and that canon^1 exists perfectly in God's mind, we can see that the clarity and knowledge of canon^2 is dependent not upon human beings, councils, churches, or anything else in this world, but instead upon *God's purposes* in giving us the inspired Scriptures in the first place. Is a clear knowledge of the canon's extent important to the function of Scripture in the church? Yes. So does it not follow that God will both providentially preserve the Scriptures *and* lead His people to a functional, sufficient knowledge of the canon so as to fulfill His purpose in inspiring them? Indeed, will he not exercise just as much divine power in establishing and fulfilling His purpose for the Scriptures (their functioning as a guide to the church) as he has in inspiring them? These two actions are necessarily linked in fulfilling the one purpose of God. (White, *Scripture Alone*, 102)

[61] Walvoord lists several individuals, and corresponding Scripture references, that were said to possess the gift of prophecy during the first century church: Agabus (Acts 11:27–28); Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, and Paul (Acts 13:1); the four daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9); Judas and Silas (Acts 15:32). By way of observation, Walvoord notes that in the New Testament—in contrast to what can be seen from the Old Testament—the prophetic gift was not limited to men, and in all probability, all of the apostles possessed the gift of prophecy. John Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit: A Comprehensive Study of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 177–79.

the New Testament prophet[62]; (3) elements of the gift of prophecy[63]; (4) the need of the prophetic gift in the apostolic church[64]; and (5) the temporary character of the prophetic gift.[65] Walvoord's plentiful utilization of cross references demonstrates his desire to ground the cessation of the gift of prophecy in Scripture, not in church history or human experience.[66]

Although closely related to Dispensationalism, Baptists who subscribe to Progressive Dispensationalism would recognize themselves as belonging to a distinct theological circle.[67] For example, when comparing John Walvoord's and Daniel B. Wallace's approaches to addressing the question of whether the gift of prophecy has

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[62] For Walvoord, the New Testament prophet partook of some of the characteristics of the Old Testament prophet:

> Both spoke for God; both warned of judgment upon sin; both delivered their message as from God; both dealt with contemporaneous events as well as predicted events of the future. The Old Testament prophet, however, often had the character of a national leader, reformer, or patriot, and delivered his message to Israel. The New Testament prophet has no national characteristics; his message is individual and personal; it revealed the will of God which otherwise might have been unknown, meeting the need which later was to be filled by the written New Testament. (Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, 244)

[63] Walvoord identifies three essential elements to the gift of prophecy: "(1) the prophet must have received his/her message from God in the form of some special revelation. . . . (2) the prophet must have divine guidance in the declaration of this revelation, corresponding to the inspiration of the written Word. . . . (3) the message delivered by the prophet must bear with it the authority of God." Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, 244–45.

[64] Based on what can be gleaned about the first century church, Walvoord concludes that there was a fundamental necessity for the gift of prophecy due to "(1) the tremendous doctrinal transition that was occurring from those who were converting from Judaism to Christianity. . . . (2) the New Testament not being immediately completed, thereby resulting in the need for an authoritative standard and source of divine revelation for discerning the will of God. . . . (3) to ensure that the purity of the Church would be protected during its infancy stages." Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, 245.

[65] By virtue of the completed canon, in supplementation to the death of those who were commissioned to write and oversee what would become the New Testament (i.e., Apostles), Walvoord contends that there is a transient nature to the gift of prophecy. Therefore, after serving its temporary purpose during the first century, it eventually passed away. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, 245–46.

[66] Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, 239–40.

[67] Benjamin L. Merkle lucidly observes the overlap and distinctions between all variations of Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology in his publication, *Discontinuity to Continuity: A Survey of Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020).

ceased, a noticeable difference arises. In his contributions to *Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit? An Investigation into the Ministry of the Spirit of God Today*, Wallace provides eleven theses for how self-identifying cessationists should wrestle with the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the post-apostolic era of church history.[68] He delivers each of the theses against the backdrop of how he has pondered balancing a rigorous commitment to deeply studying Scripture and desiring to have contact with God in an intimately personal way.[69] While Wallace concludes his chapter with a reiteration of his affirmation of cessationism—including the gift of prophecy—he does so from a posture of open-mindedness to what God the Holy Spirit *could do* in every era of church history (even after the first century).[70] Wallace's argumentation is safeguarded by the guardrails of special revelation, but not restrictive upon the power and providence of the triune God.

In *Spiritual Gifts: What They Are and & Why They Matter*, Thomas R. Schreiner comments on the continuationism-cessationism debate, providing his basis for adhering to "a kind of cessationism" as a self-identifying Progressive Covenantalist.[71] From the outset of the book, Schreiner acknowledges the diversity that exists among self-identifying

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[68] The eleven theses provided in Daniel B. Wallace, *Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit? An Investigation into the Ministry of the Spirit of God Today* (Dallas: Biblical Studies, 2013), 7–13. "(1) although the sign gifts died in the first century, the Holy Spirit did not" (8); "(2) although charismatics have sometimes given a higher priority to experience than to relationship, rationalistic evangelicals have just as frequently given a higher priority to knowledge than to relationship" (8); "(3) this emphasis on knowledge over relationship can produce in us a bibliolatry" (8); "(4) the net effect of such bibliolatry is a depersonalization of God" (9); "(5) part of the motivation for depersonalizing God is an increasing craving for control" (9); "(6) God is still a God of healing and miracles" (9); "(7) evangelical rationalism can lead to spiritual defection" (10); "(8) many of the power brokers of evangelicalism, since the turn of the century, have been white, obsessive compulsive males" (11); "(9) the Holy Spirit's guidance is still needed in discerning the will of God" (12); "(10) in the midst of seeking out the power of the Spirit, we must not avoid the sufferings of Christ" (12); "(11) finally, a question: to what does the Spirit bear witness?" (13).

[69] Wallace, *Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit?*, 7.

[70] Wallace's concluding charge is equally applicable to self-identifying charismatic and cessationist believers: "My challenge to each of us is this: reexamine the New Testament teaching about the Holy Spirit. Don't gloss over the passages, but wrestle with what they mean. If the Spirit did not die in the first century, then what in the world is he doing today?" Wallace, *Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit?*, 14.

[71] Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 7.

cessationists, the complexity of the debate about spiritual gifts, and the practical implications directly associated with identifying as either a continuationist or cessationist.[72] Chapters 6 and 7 are exclusively devoted to the gift of prophecy, with the intention of carefully defining the gift itself[73] and explaining its nature at every point in biblical history.[74] Schreiner's efforts to anticipate objections to his contentions are evidenced through him devoting an entire chapter to outlining ten unconvincing arguments for the cessation of the sign gifts, as well as in an honest interaction with the difficulties associated with his views.[75]

Baptistic proponents of New Covenant Theology do not appear to have produced a standard literary work on the continuationism-cessationism debate. Nevertheless, there is an online paper authored by Fred G. Zaspel that features his perspective on how Christians should regard the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In chapter 4 of the paper, Zaspel identifies the gift of prophecy under the following categories: "temporary," "speaking," "support," and "foundational" gifts.[76] Within the framework of

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[72] Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 7–9.

[73] Based on Schreiner's assessment of the biblical record, the gift of prophecy is to be understood as

> the reception of spontaneous revelations that are communicated to God's people. Prophecy isn't the same thing as preaching since those who preach exposit the biblical text, though [prophecy] can overlap with preaching in that prophets may exhort and encourage God's people with God's word. . . . What marks prophecy out . . . is the reception of spontaneous revelations from God, and such words instruct, encourage, and warn the people of God. (Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 77–78)

[74] Having reviewed prophecy in light of the Old and New Testaments, Schreiner concludes,

> New Testament prophecy is not mixed with error but is infallible and inerrant, just like Old Testament prophecy. . . . The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and New Testament prophets . . . [and] the claims that New Testament prophets erred aren't credible. The total truthfulness of New Testament prophets was a vital matter in the early church because false prophets were a constant danger. If New Testament prophets spoke a mixture of truth and error, discerning who were false and true prophets would have been a nightmare. . . . What many in charismatic circles call prophecies are rightly labeled impressions. God may give these impressions but they should not be received with the same level of authority as Old or New Testament prophecy. (Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 93)

[75] Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 113–28.

[76] Fred G. Zaspel, "Spiritual Gifts," India Documents, October 14, 2014, https://fdocuments.in/document/spiritual-gifts-by-fred-g-zaspel.html, chap. 4.

the aforementioned categories Zaspel provides his understanding of the gift of prophecy[77] in addition to why he believes this gift of the Holy Spirit ceased at the close of the first century.[78] Furthermore, Zaspel devotes space to developing a flyover sketch of how miraculous gifts—including prophecy—were predominantly concentrated into three eras of redemptive history.[79] Throughout his consideration of the gift of prophecy, Zaspel repeatedly grounds his argumentation with pertinent passages of Scripture and offers candid surveys of what is experienced from everyday life.

For a glimpse into a writing sample from the Particular Baptist tradition, Samuel E. Waldron offers a book-length defense of what he has labeled, "the cascade argument for cessationism." In *To Be Continued? Are the Miraculous Gifts for Today?*, Waldron

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[77] In chap. 15 of his paper, titled "Prophets & Prophecy," Zaspel defines the gift of prophecy as "the ability to declare truth received directly from God, [of which] was obtained by special revelation. The prophets were mouthpieces of God, speaking His word, to their world, regarding either past, present, or future truth. They were men of inspired utterance." Zaspel, "Spiritual Gifts," chap. 15.

[78] Zaspel cites four primary factors as evidence for the cessation of the gift of prophecy:

> (1) there is no need for [the gift of prophecy] today. God has given a complete revelation which is altogether sufficient in all matters of faith and practice. The prophets met a unique need of that first century church, before [New Testament] revelation was available. The church today does not need any prophets to give new revelation, only teachers and preachers to expose [the] revelation already given. . . . (2) No revelation is being given today. No one today can add a verse to Scripture; no one today is receiving new truth. . . . (3) The prophets were the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20), which is now complete. . . . (4) 1 Corinthians 13:8–13 specifically predicts [the demise of the gift of prophecy] with the completed canon of Scripture. With a complete Scripture, the other prophecies are useless. (Zaspel, "Spiritual Gifts," chap. 15)

[79] Zaspel argues that the Bible records basically three periods of miracles:

> (1) Moses & Joshua—The incidents of the plagues of Egypt, the parting of the sea, water from the rock, the quick and immediate judgment on Korah, the fall of Jericho, the long day, etc. Before the time of Moses and Joshua, [and] even after, miracles are virtually unheard of. . . . There are sporadic miraculous events (such as during the period of the Judges), but the presence of a miracle worker, one who could at will cause the miraculous, was not enjoyed. . . . (2) Elijah & Elisha—With the ministry of these men, rain was withheld, fire was brought from heaven, a widow's food was supernaturally supplied, a boy was raised from the dead, the Jordan River was crossed again, a leper was cured, and on and on goes the list (at least eight miracles each). . . . With the passing of these men, miracles cease; miracles recur occasionally (as in the time of Daniel), but the ability to perform them is gone. . . . (3) Christ & His Apostles—The four gospels seem to never end in their record of the unsurpassed miracles of Christ, conquering demonic forces, diseases, and even death. His apostles were given similar power, although not to the same extent. They too performed an abundance of miracles. The pattern of Biblical history then repeats with their passing, again there is silence. Miracles do appear evident from time to time, but the presence of one who can at will heal diseases and raise the dead is conspicuously absent. (Zaspel, "Spiritual Gifts," chap. 13)

constructs a progressive argument for the cessation of every sign gift of the Holy Spirit *on the basis* of the termination of the apostolic office.[80] In view of prophecy, he devotes an entire section of his book to define prophecy,[81] demonstrates how the gift and function of prophecy shared continuity across the Old and New Testaments,[82] addresses common objections to the argumentation being employed for the cessation of prophecy,[83] and argues for the cessation of this spiritual gift in all generations following the apostolic era of church history.[84] On several occasions throughout the volume, Waldron includes charts to illustrate how each of his subsequent premises continue to build off one another.

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[80] Waldron, *To Be Continued?*, 15–16.

[81] Waldron insists, "A true prophet possesses, and must possess, two infallible marks: (1) what he prophesies must *always* come true; (2) he must not contradict previous revelation, but teach people to follow the true God (the God revealed through Moses)." Waldron, *To Be Continued?*, 52.

[82] Waldron draws three crucial conclusions about how the gift of prophecy should be understood in light of Old and New Testament revelation:

> (1) There is no reason to accept, but rather every reason to reject, the idea that New Testament prophecy lacks the infallibility of all other biblical prophecy; (2) all professed prophecy must be held to the standard of Deuteronomy 18:15–22. [Prophecy] must be prepared to pass the test of absolute infallibility. If a prophet cannot pass this test, he or she must repent of and renounce the claim to prophetic status; (3) [it is misguided to assume] that New Testament prophecy is equivalent to what is more properly called Spirit-anointed preaching. . . . There is not a single passage in the New Testament where the biblical terminology related to prophecy or prophesying refers to anything but the inspired reception and utterance of direct revelation [from God]. (Waldron, *To Be Continued?*, 69)

[83] Arguments cited, and commented on, by Waldron for the post-apostolic continuation of the gift of prophecy: "(1) New Testament prophecy was given for purposes not yet fulfilled" (Waldron, *To Be Continued?*, 61); "(2) New Testament prophecy ceases only with the Second Coming of Christ" (62); "(3) "New Testament prophecy is significantly different from Old Testament prophecy" (65).

[84] Arguments cited, and commented on, by Waldron for the post-apostolic cessation of the gift of prophecy: "(1) the New Testament prophets were foundational" (Waldron, *To Be Continued?*,75); "(2) the New Testament prophets were infallible" (77); "(3) the New Testament prophets were canonical" (77).

Void in the Literature

There is a plethora of books on the biblical doctrine of covenant.[85] There are ample literary resources on how the canon of Scripture should be understood. [86] Moreover, when surveying the corpus of scholarship on the office and function of "apostle" or "prophet," one will discover that theologians have made voluminous remarks as to whether God continues to provide special revelation to his people in the post-apostolic era of redemptive history.[87] However, little has been said about *how* each of these biblical realities directly relate to one another.[88] The intersection of covenant, canon, and the cessation of normative post-apostolic revelation is a biblical-theological connection waiting to be explored by Baptistic theologians. Although some theologians have made vague comments on the interchange between covenant, canon, and the cessation of normative post-apostolic revelation, there has yet to be a full-length treatment on this matter.[89] After

[85] Chap. 2 provides extensive interaction with the relevant literature on the biblical, theological, and historical underpinnings of covenant. Moreover, chap. 2 reveals the interconnectedness of covenant and the biblical storyline, demonstrating that covenant is special revelation from God to man. Since covenant is central to God's temporal and eschatological dealings with his people, it is important to ensure that the concept and function of covenant is accurately understood.

[86] Chap. 3 offers a systematic overview of how canon has been understood across multi-denominational lines. In doing so, the reader can satisfactorily assess how Baptists have regarded this doctrine throughout history, in conjunction with the universal church. In summation, chap. 3 will showcase how God's covenantal revelation culminates in written documents and will analyze how each book of the Old and New Testaments are situated within their respective, postlapsarian covenant.

[87] Chap. 4 surveys the Protestant conception of the apostolic and prophetic offices, in supplementation to their divinely ordained function within redemptive history. The literature cited throughout this portion of the thesis will aid the apologetical and polemical nature of this chapter. Upon citing three lines of supporting evidence, a new covenant case for the cessation of normative post-apostolic revelation will be developed against the backdrop of common objections thereto.

[88] Although many Baptistic theologians have made a case for the cessation of post-apostolic revelation, specifically in reference to the sign gift of prophecy, there is a noticeable absence of argumentation from the covenantal and canonical framework that is developed in this thesis. Through systematic biblical exegesis, penetrating theological discussion, and strategic historical investigation, this thesis will provide Baptistic Christians with a clear apologetic for why post-apostolic revelation should not be normative for, and should not be regularly expected by, New Covenant Believers.

[89] The scholarship of Meredith G. Kline (1922–2007) exemplifies the most substantial treatment of how covenant, canon, and the cessation of normative post-apostolic revelation are inextricably connected. Kline's most helpful works on the organic intersection of covenant, canon, and the ensuing cessation of prophecy are *God, Heaven and Har Magedon: A Covenantal Tale of Cosmos and Telos* (Eugene, OR: Wipf

consulting over 300 germane resources, it is evident that Baptistic theologians have yet to delve into the unchartered waters of the convergence between covenant, canon, and the cessation of normative post-apostolic revelation. Thus, there is a stark need for Baptists to produce literature that not only surveys the biblical-theological reasons for recognizing why God no longer regularly provides his people with normative special revelation, but also details the ensuing implications for God's people that stem from this observation.[90] In summation, there is a need within Baptistic scholarship for providing a reasoned defense for the cessation of normative, post-apostolic, special revelation in light of the New Testament (Covenant) canon. For the glory of God and the purity of his church, this thesis will supply the apologetical and polemical work that has been lacking for far too long.

Thesis Statement

Scripture indicates that covenant is the medium through which God promises an eschatological (eternal) relationship with him.[91] Upon recognizing God's promise of

& Stock, 2006); *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006); *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997); and *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020). Despite Kline's helpful work on these subjects, he does not devote a book-length treatment toward dealing with the relationship between these theological realities. Also, given Kline's Presbyterian roots, there is still a great need for expounding these matters from a Baptistic perspective.

[90] Having discovered how God's special revelation is covenantal revelation (chap. 2), and upon recognizing how the development of canonical documents epitomize the culmination of God's covenantal revelation to his people (chap. 3), the inevitable conclusion is that God does not provide additional, normative revelation in any era of the post-apostolic church (chap. 4). Therefore, the concluding chapter of this thesis will survey the apologetical and polemical implications that the cessation of normative new covenant revelation should have on the church catholic (chap. 5).

[91] A unique distinctive of this thesis is the championing of a sixteenth and seventeenth century Particular Baptist understanding of federal (covenant) theology, as exemplified in the Second London Baptist Confession. This thesis will argue that, in accordance with God's sovereign arrangement of the created order, it is *impossible* for humanity to have an eschatological (eternal) relationship with God apart from *covenant*. Stated differently, there is never a moment in redemptive history, or in the life of an image bearer, in which *covenant* does not advance man's natural religious fellowship with God to either eschatological life in Heaven, or eschatological death in Hell. Chap. 2 will explicate the biblical-theological basis for this conviction and will solidify its relevance to the paramount argument undergirding this thesis.

an eschatological (eternal) relationship as special revelation, it becomes evident that God's special revelation to man is covenantal revelation.[92] Moreover, God's covenantal revelation to his people is inextricably linked to the canonical documents that function as the culmination of God's self-revelation to man.[93] Therefore, by virtue of the finality of the New Covenant, the God-ordained process of revealing himself in the New Covenant, and the corresponding New Covenant documents, this thesis will demonstrate why additional special revelation should not be a normative expectation for all eras of the post-apostolic church.[94]

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[92] Written special revelation is nothing less than God directly and unmistakably communicating with man, in order to enable the creature to understand—or perform a specific task within—the created order. Louis Berkhof notes that God has employed four primary means of dispensing special revelation to his creatures: "(1) theophanies (Gen. 16:13; 31:11; Ex. 23:20–23; Mal. 3:1; etc)." Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 134; "(2) direct communications (Deut. 5:4; Num. 12:6; 27:21; Isa. 6; etc)" (134–35); "(3) miracles (Ex. 14:13–31; Josh. 10:1–15; 1 Kings 18:20–46; 2 Kings 20:1–21; etc.)" (135–36); "(4) Scripture (Ps. 119:89; 1 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 1:1–2; 2 Pet. 1:20–21; etc)" (136). Given each of these categories, it is clear that *any* divine promise of an eschatological relationship is special revelation. Whether in verbal or written form, God's promise of an eschatological relationship comes to humanity exclusively through his gracious disclosure thereof. Man cannot reason himself to an eschatological relationship with the Most High; God, and God alone, enables the creature to relate to him on his own terms (Rom 9:16). Furthermore, God's promise of an eschatological relationship with man, as special revelation, is also directly tied to *covenant*. Although God can dispense special revelation to man *apart* from covenant (i.e., during the prelapsarian estate: Gen 1:28–30), the promise and provision of an eschatological relationship—communicated to man as special revelation—is intrinsically covenantal. From the Garden of Eden to the Last Day, this is the perceptible pattern attributed to every redemptive-historical covenant that carries the promise of an eschatological relationship with God: the covenant of works (Gen 2:16–17; Hos 6:7; Rom 5:12–21), the Abrahamic Covenant, (Gen 12:1–3; 15:1–21; 17:1–27; Gal 4:21–31), and the New Covenant/Covenant of Grace (Jer 31:31–34; Luke 22:20; Heb 8:6–13; 9:1–28; 10:1–22). Chaps. 2–3 will discuss these biblical-theological elements at greater length.

[93] Kline helpfully traces the indivisibility of God's covenantal revelation to man, and the redemptive-historical emergence of documents that comprise the canon of Scripture (as recognized and received by Protestants):

> Our traditional designations of "Old Testament" and "New Testament" have been all the while more precisely appropriate than we have realized. . . . The documents which combine to form the Bible are in their very nature—a legal sort of nature, it turns out—covenantal. In short, the Bible *is* the old and new covenants. . . . Because the Bible *is* the old and new covenants and because canon is inherent in covenant of the biblical type, canonicity is inherent in the very form and identity of Scripture as the Old Testament and the New Testament. The canonical authority of the Bible is in a class by itself because its covenantal words are the words of God. . . . All Scripture is covenantal, and the canonicity of all the Scripture is covenantal. Biblical canon is covenantal canon. (Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, 74–75)

[94] On the basis of Scripture, the New Covenant in Christ's blood is the final divine covenant that God has been pleased to inaugurate in redemptive history (Jer 31:31–34; Luke 22:20; Heb 8:1–13). It

Outline of Chapters

The following chapters will solidify the assertion of this thesis. The argument will progress, chapter-by-chapter, to show how the cessation of normative post-apostolic revelation organically results from a proper biblical-theological understanding of the relationship between covenant, canon, and the nature of the prophetic office/function.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The preliminary chapter of the thesis will showcase familiarity with the most relevant literature to considerations of covenant, canon, and the spiritual gift of prophecy. Upon identifying salient resources for each of those subjects, the void in the literature will be clarified, thereby detailing the way in which this thesis will contribute toward satisfying the absence of scholarship. The opening chapter will conclude with the thesis statement to be defended throughout the entirety of the paper.

Chapter 2: The Biblical-Theological Centrality of Covenant

Since covenant is central to God's temporal and eschatological dealings with his people, it is important to ensure that the concept and function of covenant is accurately understood. As such, this chapter will reveal the interconnectedness of covenant and the biblical storyline, demonstrating that covenant is special revelation from God to man. To accomplish this objective, a biblical word study of "covenant" will be conducted in addition to unpacking how "covenant" was understood during the patristic, medieval, reformation, and modern eras of church history. Moreover, a survey of the biblical-

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is against the backdrop of this reality that the thesis speaks of the "finality of the New Covenant" (especially in chaps. 3 and 4). What's more, as previously indicated, God's ordained process of revealing himself in the New Covenant—and in the corresponding New Covenant documents—will be explored throughout chap. 4 of the thesis. These features of the thesis will prove essential to arguing for the cessation of normative special revelation during the post-apostolic era of church history (i.e., in chap. 4 of this thesis), in addition to directing New Covenant believers in their approach to defending and sharing the Christian faith before an unbelieving world (i.e., in chap. 5 of this thesis).

theological function of covenant will be delineated in order to review how every major postlapsarian covenant within Scripture mediates special revelation from God to man.

Chapter 3: Canon Is the Culmination of Covenantal Revelation

Although every major *redemptive-historical* covenant in Scripture is originally communicated from God to man in audible form, the establishment of those covenants results in an organic production of written documents. Those written documents are the production of human authors, inspired by God the Holy Spirit, and are formulated to govern, shape, and direct God's people as they abide in covenant with Him. Therefore, this chapter will showcase how God's covenantal revelation culminates in written documents and will analyze how each book of the Old and New Testaments are situated within their respective, postlapsarian covenant.

Chapter 4: A New Covenant Apologetic for the Cessation of Normative Post-Apostolic Revelation

This chapter will be apologetical in nature, unveiling a New Covenant case for the cessation of normative post-apostolic revelation by drawing from three lines of supporting evidence. Although many Baptistic theologians have made a case for the cessation of post-apostolic revelation, specifically in reference to the sign gift of prophecy, a noticeable absence of argumentation from the covenantal and canonical framework has been developed in this thesis. Both elements will undergird the convictions espoused within this chapter, in supplementation to their logical intersection with theology proper and the testimony of redemptive history.

Chapter 5: Exploring the Intersection of Apologetics, Evangelism, and the Finality of New Covenant Revelation

Having discovered how God's special revelation is covenantal revelation, and upon recognizing how the development of canonical documents epitomize the

culmination of God's covenantal revelation to his people, we must necessarily conclude that additional divine revelation should not be a normative expectation for all eras of the post-apostolic church. Building off the content of chapter 4, this concluding chapter will further survey the apologetical, evangelistic, and polemical implications that the cessation of normative New Covenant revelation should have on the broader church.

CHAPTER 2

THE BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL CENTRALITY OF COVENANT

Whether knowingly or unknowingly, every Christian presupposes the inextricable connection between covenant and their relationship with the living God. Indeed, covenant is at the heart of the Christian life because covenant is at the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ.[1] Apart from covenant, Christianity ceases to be Christianity because the gospel is fundamentally covenantal in nature. Throughout his tenure at Reformed Theological Seminary, J. Ligon Duncan III has tirelessly emphasized this biblical-theological principle in his seminal course on covenant theology:

> Covenant theology is at the heart of Gospel ministry because covenant theology is the Gospel. If you don't understand covenant theology, you are not ready to convey the Gospel in all of its glory and all of its fullness to the people of God, and to those outside of the covenant in order to draw them in to the experience of the fullness of the covenant mercies. [Covenant theology] is not something peripheral. [Covenant theology is not] something that simply divides Christians, like Dispensationalists or Baptists and Presbyterians. [Rather, covenant theology] strikes at the very heart of our understanding of the person and work of Christ, of the Gospel of salvation, of redemptive history, and of the relationship between the Old and the New Testament. Covenant theology is that central [to Christianity].[2]

Duncan's incisive remarks about covenant's importance to Christianity are not merely the fruit of his theological tradition, or his experience teaching on the doctrine of covenant to graduate level students. On the contrary, his convictions about covenant are

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[1] While covenant is at the heart of the gospel—and the gospel is certainly at the heart of Christianity—the gospel is not the only biblical truth impacted by covenant. In fact, from Genesis to Revelation, covenant is at the heart of *all* of God's relationships to mankind. Whether speaking about the Old Testament or New Testament, covenant is foundational to man's relationship with the Most High.

[2] J. Ligon Duncan, "Introduction to Covenant Theology" (online course, Reformed Theological Seminary, October 4, 2013), https://ligonduncan.com/introduction-to-covenant-theology-1198/. Although the covenant theology espoused in this thesis differs from Duncan's (Padeobaptist) covenant theology, the quote can nevertheless be rightly appropriated to a Particular Baptist (1689 Federalist) conception of covenant theology with proper distinctions.

expressed *just as strongly* by theologians across multi-denominational lines.[3] A survey of church history reveals ample confessions of faith that codify a Christian consensus on the necessity of covenant for affirming biblical doctrine.[4] In other words, despite doctrinal discontinuities that yield varying theological traditions, Bible believing Christians have a storied history of acknowledging covenant as paradigmatic for establishing Christian doctrine.[5] Therefore, when viewed through the lens of history, covenant is inseparably bound to biblical orthodoxy, as broadly championed by the heirs of the Protestant Reformation.[6]

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[3] In addition to exploring how *covenant* has been defined throughout church history, consider the following samples (from just the past century) of how theologians have recognized the architectonic importance of covenant to the Christian faith. For the sake of concision, one citation from the Anglican and Baptist traditions will serve as an adequate supplement to Duncan's Presbyterian perspective. First, J. I. Packer (Anglican perspective): "The gospel of God is not properly understood till it is viewed within a covenantal frame. . . . The word of God is not properly understood till it is viewed within a covenantal frame. . . . The reality of God is not properly understood till it is viewed within a covenantal frame." J. I. Packer, "Introduction on Covenant Theology," in Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man: Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity*, trans. William Crookshank (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2010), 1:31, 32, 34. Second, Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum (Baptist perspective): "Apart from properly understanding the nature of the biblical covenants and how they relate to each other, one will not correctly discern the message of the Bible and hence God's self-disclosure, which centers on and culminates in our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . In fact, most varieties of Christian theology readily admit that the biblical covenants establish a central framework that holds the storyline of Scripture together." Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 32.

[4] The following confessions of faith are associated with prominent groups originating from the Protestant Reformation: *The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion* (Anglicanism); *The Orthodox Creed* (General Baptists); *The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith* (Particular Baptists); *The Augsburg Confession* (Lutheranism); *The Confession of Faith of the Calvinistic Methodists of Wales* (Methodism); *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Presbyterianism). While these doctrinal statements do not encapsulate the totality of what has been believed or taught by churches who embrace them, they nonetheless demonstrate how Christians—from a multiplicity of theological traditions—have a *history* of seeking to articulate their understanding of Scripture through creeds. Moreover, when canvassing these specific statements of faith, one discovers that the term and/or concept of *covenant* is instrumental to the doctrine being confessed therein.

[5] The conceptions of covenant in the Patristic, Medieval, Reformation, and Modern eras of church history are considered in the next section of this chapter.

[6] Herman Bavinck acknowledges the seismic role that covenant played in biblical-theological interpretation amongst the Continental (Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin) and Dutch Reformers (Heinrich Bullinger, Caspar Olevianus, Johann Cloppenburg, Johannes Cocceius). Herman Bavinck, *Prolegomena*, vol. 1 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 103–4.

This chapter will employ three viewpoints to accentuate the biblical-theological centrality of covenant, and its link to Christian orthodoxy. The first viewpoint will provide a working definition for "covenant" after examining how the English term has been translated from the biblical languages, and how Christians have reflected on "covenant" for two millennia. Upon generating a definition for the term itself, the second viewpoint will explore the *necessity* of covenant for man to enjoy eschatological life with his Creator. This second viewpoint will develop how Scripture portrays covenant as rooted in God's *ad intra* life and encompasses God's *ad extra* work within creation (particularly with humanity). Finally, the third viewpoint delineated in this chapter will underscore the *function* of covenant for man to enjoy eschatological life with his Creator. In keeping with the aforementioned premise, considerable attention will be allocated to demonstrate how God's special revelation to man is covenantal in nature. By the conclusion of this chapter, the biblical-theological centrality of covenant will be apparent to the reader, and the foundation for each forthcoming chapter will be concretized.

The Definition of Covenant

The word "covenant" is an English translation from two frequently used terms contained in Scripture. [7] Depending on the concordance or theological dictionary being

Against this historical backdrop, Bavinck uses vol. 2 of *Reformed Dogmatics* to punctuate the essentiality of covenant to biblical and confessionally Reformed orthodoxy:

> The [doctrine of the covenant] must never be surrendered inasmuch as covenant is the essence of true religion. . . . If religion is called a covenant, it is thereby described as the true and genuine religion. This is what no [non-Christian] religion has ever understood; all peoples either pantheistically pull God down into what is creaturely, or deistically elevate him endlessly above it. In neither case does one arrive at true fellowship, at covenant, at genuine religion. But Scripture insists on both: God is infinitely great and condescendingly good; he is Sovereign but also Father; he is Creator but also Prototype. In a word, he is the God of the covenant." (Herman Bavinck, *God and Creation*, vol. 2 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004], 569–70)

[7] Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 262–64. As discernable from the evidence of history, the Bible was originally written in three languages: Aramaic, Greek, and Hebrew. The Old Testament was predominantly written in Hebrew, along with some segments of post-exilic writings that were penned in Aramaic. On the other hand, the New Testament was originally written in Greek. Thus, when attempting to make sense of "covenant," it is essential to unpack the original linguistic sources undergirding this English term. As elucidated in this section, the Hebrew and Greek terms for

reviewed for a lexical analysis of "covenant," the term בְּרִית (*berith*) is found over 280 times in the Old Testament (Hebrew) Scriptures,[8] and the word διαθήκη (*diathéké*) is cited at least 30 times in the New Testament (Greek) Scriptures.[9] An abundance of ink has been spilled in attempting to surmise a declarative meaning for these Hebrew and Greek counterparts, ultimately producing largely inconclusive results as to how the etymology and semantic range of the terms can be most faithfully represented.[10] Regarding בְּרִית (*berith*), proposed meanings have ranged anywhere from "to eat,"[11] "to choose,"[12] "to

covenant will be given specific attention. For an illuminating synopsis of the Bible's transcription, transmission, and preservation process, see Timothy P. Jones, *How We Got the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Rose, 2017).

[8] Gentry and Wellum note that there are 288 occurrences of בְּרִית (*berith*) throughout the Old Testament. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 841–904. In conjunction to their count, the following works are referenced on p. 841 of their work, along with corresponding amounts of בְּרִית (*berith*) citations: 283 times in Abraham Even-Shoshan, *A New Concordance to the Old Testament* (Jerusalem: Sivan, 1982); 285 times in David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, vol. 2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995); 286 times in Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 23 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007).

[9] The following resources represent a sampling of how Bible scholars have observed the use of διαθήκη (*diathéké*) in the New Testament: 30 citations in Geerhardus Vos, *Anthropology*, vol. 2 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin, trans. John R. de Witt, Daan van der Kraan, and Harry Boonstra (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2012), 78; "Over 30 citations" in Daniel I. Block, *Covenant: The Framework of God's Grand Plan of Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021), 394; 31 citations in Gregory G. Nichols, *Covenant Theology: A Reformed and Baptistic Perspective on God's Covenants* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian, 2014), 105; 31 citations in George V. Wigram, *The Englishman's Greek Concordance of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006).

[10] O. Palmer Robertson offers extensive footnote interaction with six prominent, twentieth-century biblical scholars to demonstrate dissenting views on how "covenant" should be understood through its etymological and semantic lenses. O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1985), 5. Robertson's observations in the twentieth century are consistent with the observations made by Francis Turretin in the seventeenth century. For Turretin's perspective on the etymology and semantic range of בְּרִית (*berith*) and διαθήκη (*diathéké*), see Francis Turretin, *Eleventh through Seventeenth Topics*, vol. 2 of *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1992), 169–71.

[11] Turretin, *Eleventh through Seventeenth Topics*, 169.

[12] John Owen, *Biblical Theology: The History of Theology from Adam to Christ* (Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994), 205.

pledge,"[13] or "to cut,"[14] whereas διαθήκη (*diathéké*) has been perceived as "to make a will/testament,"[15] "to contract,"[16] "to make an arrangement,"[17] or "to make a commitment."[18] Depending on which resource is consulted, it can appear as though the onus is on the biblical scholar to show how their definition of בְּרִית (*berith*) and διαθήκη (*diathéké*) differ from those who have opined in the past.[19]

In supplementation to the diverse opinions that exist regarding the definition of the term, and in an effort to apprehend covenant through a biblical-theological framework, a brief assessment of church history is in order. When considered holistically, God's people have diligently committed themselves to searching the Scriptures for the most cogent understanding of "covenant." Whether investigating the Patristic (AD 100–500), Medieval (AD 500–1500), Reformation (AD 1500–1700), or Modern (AD 1700–present) eras,[20] Christians have consistently assigned covenant an eminent degree of biblical and

[13] Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2017), 136.

[14] Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 187.

[15] Herman Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, vol. 3 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 205.

[16] Walter Bauer et al., eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2019), 228.

[17] Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 2:125.

[18] Samuel Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ: His Covenant and His Kingdom* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2019), 40.

[19] Delbert R. Hillers poignantly summarizes the difficulty for biblical scholars to reach unanimity when defining "covenant": "[Defining covenant] is not the case of six blind men and the elephant, but of a group of learned paleontologists creating different monsters from the fossils of six separate species." Delbert R. Hillers, *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1969), 7.

[20] Carl Trueman identifies these four eras as "the standard division with which we now operate [in studying historical theology]." Carl Trueman, "Patristics and Reformed Orthodoxy: Some Brief Notes and Proposals," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 2 (2008): 52. In light of Trueman's commentary, one noteworthy representative from each of church history's major eras has been cited to introduce the reader to how covenant has been regarded by the universal church over the past 2,000 years.

theological importance. For the sake of illustration, ponder the subsequent definitions of "covenant" offered by a prominent figure from each of the four major categories of church history:[21]

Irenaeus of Lyons (A Patristic Case Study)

In his dissertation on "The Covenant Idea in Ante-Nicene Theology," J. Ligon Duncan III posits three ways in which Irenaeus understands Scripture's theology of the covenants: "(1) a relational sense (a divine-human relationship with blessings and obligations); (2) an historical sense (an era typified by a particular stage in redemptive history); (3) a testamentary sense (a divine will)."[22] Upon surveying the corpus of Irenaeus's surviving literature, one finds each of these facets portrayed in an excerpt from his classic work, *Against Heresies*.[23] As showcased below, Irenaeus emphatically associates the "Gospel covenant" with the death of Christ, the spiritual blessings that come in connection with Christ's death, and the will of God:

> Christ [died], that the Gospel covenant being manifested and known to the whole world, might in the first place set free His slaves; and then afterwards, as I have already shown, might constitute them heirs of His property, when the Spirit possesses them by inheritance. For he who lives inherits, but the flesh is inherited. In order that we may not lose life by losing that Spirit which possesses us, the apostle, exhorting

[21] Each of the four figures documented at this stage of the thesis—representing the Patristic, Medieval, Reformation, and Modern periods of church history—are championed as "major church leaders" in the glossary of Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 735–58. While these individuals do not embody an *exhaustive* account for how covenant was regarded in their respective category of church history, they do offer some of the best insights on covenant as exemplars of their context.

[22] J. Ligon Duncan, "The Covenant Idea in Ante-Nicene Theology" (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 1995), 141–42.

[23] As summarized by Allison,

> Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130–c. 200) [was] trained under Polycarp, a missionary to Gaul (modern-day France) and [was a] bishop of Lyons. He systematically refuted heresy, particularly Gnosticism, in his lengthy writing *Against Heresies*. His doctrine of recapitulation maintained that Jesus Christ recapitulated, or retraced, the life cycle of human beings, undoing the disobedience of Adam and accomplishing salvation through his obedient life and death. (Allison, *Historical Theology*, 748)

> us to the communion of the Spirit, has said, according to reason, in those words already quoted, "That flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God."[24]

Speaking within a Patristic setting, Irenaeus believed covenant to be the vehicle through which believers will inherit the divine will.[25] As observable in the preceding excerpt, Irenaeus stresses two key components of the divine will: (1) To be set free from sin, to become heirs of Christ's property, and to be possessed by the Spirit[26]; (2) to proclaim the manifestation of the gospel of Jesus Christ—with a special emphasis on his death—to the whole world.[27] At this juncture Irenaeus's musings on covenant are not only most clear, but epitomize some of the chief contributions made toward expounding covenant in the Patristic age.

Thomas Aquinas (A Medieval Case Study)

Of all the theologians attributed to the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas is *sui generis*.[28] Nicknamed the "Angelic Doctor," Aquinas devoted his life to synthesizing the truths of natural and special revelation, perhaps most notably in *Summa Contra Gentiles* and *Summa Theologiae*.[29] In the latter work, Aquinas models the *crème de la crème* of Medieval scholarship on defining how covenant should be ascertained through a biblically and theologically informed perspective[30]:

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[24] Irenaeus of Lyons, "Chapter IX—Showing How That Passage of the Apostle Which the Heretics Pervert, Should Be Understood; Viz., 'Flesh and Blood Shall Not Possess the Kingdom of God,'" in St. Irenaeus: Against Heresies: Book V—Christian Classics Ethereal Library, accessed July 26, 2022, https://ccel.org/ccel/irenaeus/against_heresies_v/anf01.ix.vii.x.html, para. 4

[25] The "testamentary sense" of covenant.

[26] The "relational sense" of covenant.

[27] The "historical sense" of covenant.

[28] Robert G. Clouse, "Thomas Aquinas," in *Introduction to the History of Christianity*, ed. Tim Dowley et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 292.

[29] Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 231–32.

[30] Allison summarizes Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) as a "Medieval philosopher, Dominican monk, and eminent scholastic theologian, who is best known for the integration of Christian theology and

> A testament is the disposal of a heritage. But God disposed of a heavenly heritage to men, to be bestowed through the virtue of the blood of Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:16). Now Christ's blood was exhibited to men in two ways. First of all in figure, and this belongs to the Old Testament; consequently the Apostle concludes (Heb. 9:16): "Whereupon neither was the first [covenant] indeed dedicated without blood," which is evident from this, that as related in Ex. 24:7, 8, "when every" commandment of the law "had been read" by Moses, "he sprinkled all the people" saying: "This is the blood of the testament which the Lord hath enjoined unto you." Secondly, [Christ's blood] was shown in very truth; and this belongs to the New Testament. This is what the Apostle premises when he says (Heb. 9:15): "Therefore He is the Mediator of the New Testament, that by means of His death . . . they that are called may receive the promise of eternal inheritance." Consequently, we say here, "The blood of the New Testament," because it is shown now not in figure but in truth; and therefore we add, "which shall be shed for you." But the internal inspiration has its origin in the power of this blood, according as we are justified by Christ's Passion.[31]

According to Aquinas, the Old and New Testament records depict covenant ("testament") as the disposal of God's heavenly heritage to men, which is ultimately bestowed on the basis of the blood of Jesus Christ. When evaluating this citation on its own terms, Aquinas appears to stand in continuity with Irenaeus's thoughts on the "testamentary sense" of covenant,[32] and even reflects similarities to the definition of covenant recommended by O. Palmer Robertson in the twentieth century.[33] Although Aquinas is not in lockstep agreement with his Patristic predecessors or Reformed successors, his work embodied in the *Summa Theologiae* bears witness to the efforts advanced by God's people to solidify their interpretation of covenant during the Medieval era of church history.

Aristotelian philosophy. . . . In 1879 Pope Leo XIII declared Thomism (Aquinas's teaching) to be eternally valid for the Roman Catholic Church." Allison, *Historical Theology*, 755–56.

[31] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Book III, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, accessed July 27, 2022, https://ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa/summa.TP_Q78_A3.html, question 78, article 3.

[32] See Irenaeus' "testamentary sense" of covenant explicated previously.

[33] Robertson offers his definition of covenant: "A covenant is a bond-in-blood. It involves commitments with life-and-death consequences. At the point of covenantal inauguration, the parties of the covenant are committed to one another by a formalizing process of blood-shedding. This blood-shedding represents the intensity of the commitment of the covenant. By the covenant they are bound for life and death." Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 14–15. As noted in Aquinas's definition of covenant, the shedding of the blood of Christ enables God to "dispose [His] heavenly heritage" to man through his covenant. In this respect, Aquinas's and Robertson's observations on covenant exhibit elements of resemblance.

Martin Luther (A Reformation Case Study)

Despite initially setting out to be a lawyer, Martin Luther's salvation in the early sixteenth century would forever alter the course of Christianity and the history of the Western world.[34] Yet his background in law—and extensive education throughout his youth—would enable Luther to become one of the most prolific Christian authors in church history.[35] As featured in *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives*, one of the clearest declarations of covenant found within the Reformation period originates from Luther's voluminous collection of writings:

> The apostle calls the promises of God a testament. The same term is used in other passages of Scripture. In this way it was indicated darkly that God would die, and that thus, in God's promise, as in a formally announced testament, God's incarnation and suffering were to be understood. . . . Hence one can at the same time harmonize with this what Jerome mentions, that in the Hebrew one finds "covenant" rather than "testament." He who stays alive makes a covenant; he who is about to die makes a testament. Thus Jesus Christ the immortal God made a covenant. At the same time, He made a testament, because he was going to become mortal. Just as He is both God and man, so He made both a covenant and a testament.[36]

Given this commentary provided by the great German Reformer, Luther's perception of covenant is thoroughly unilateral—and therefore—gracious in nature.[37] Unilateral covenants necessitate God as the final arbiter of who he covenants with—and what the terms of his covenantal relationships entail—as a direct byproduct of God's

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[34] Joseph E. Early, *A History of Christianity: An Introductory Survey* (Nashville: B & H, 2015), 212–15.

[35] Steven J. Lawson, *Pillars of Grace* (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust, 2016), 344.

[36] This excerpt is taken from Martin Luther's *Lectures on Galatians* (1517), as cited in Howard Griffith, "Covenant in Reformation Theology," in *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Guy Prentiss Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, and John R. Muether (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 331.

[37] To understand much of Luther's theology, one must recognize the importance of his "Law-Gospel" distinction. In short, Luther regarded "Law" as anything in Scripture that necessitated obedience from man (or condemned man for a failure to render obedience to God's statutes), and he regarded "Gospel" as anything in the Bible that signified something that God had graciously accomplished on behalf of sinners. When reflecting on Luther's definition of "covenant," it becomes clear that he associated this concept with "Gospel." Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2014), 52. For more on the Law-Gospel distinction, see Michael Horton, *Pilgrim Theology: Core Doctrines for Christian Disciples* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 37–41.

sovereignty over creation.[38] As such, Luther sees redemptive covenants as inherently gracious because the God who is under no compulsion to enter into a relationship with man not only does so, but bestows an abundance of spiritual blessings therein.[39] Although heterogeneous beliefs abounded during the Reformation era, these developments coined by Luther were crucial for shaping how many Protestants have contemplated covenant for the past five centuries.[40]

Charles Hodge (A Modern Case Study)

Over the past 500 years, few institutions have impacted global Christian education to the degree that Princeton Theological Seminary did in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[41] From 1812 to 1929, this prestigious bastion of higher learning

[38] Inasmuch as Luther appraises the unilateral component of covenant, he stands in continuity with the Particular Baptist theologian Nehemiah Coxe (1650–1689). His convictions regarding the unilateral dimension to divine-human covenants is documented:

> Whatever is transacted in a federal way between God and men, God has the first hand in it. . . . So we may say that man has not at any time entered into covenant with God but God has entered into covenant with man. It only belongs to his sovereign majesty and is the fruit of his infinite goodness to propose, as well as his wisdom to choose and order, the terms of a covenant relationship between himself and his creatures. (Nehemiah Coxe, "Covenant Relationships to God in General," in *Covenant Theology: From Adam to Christ*, ed. Ronald D. Miller, James M. Renihan, and Francisco Orozco [Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic, 2005], 35)

This parallel between Luther and Coxe on the unilateral aspect of covenant is noteworthy, for it demonstrates agreement in the Reformation era across generational and denominational contexts.

[39] A forceful example of Luther extolling the unilateral grace of God is found in his Christmas morning sermon preached on Titus 3:4–8, titled "God's Grace Received Must Be Bestowed" (1522). In that sermon, Luther belabors the certitude that "grace and salvation are not conferred upon [a sinner] because of [their] faith, but because of the will of Christ." The sermon is a masterful exposition of how God regards all believers in the New Covenant. See Martin Luther, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, ed. and trans. John Nicholas Lenker (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 6:116–35.

[40] Griffith methodically traces the influence that Luther's deliberations on covenant had on several of his contemporaries during the age of the Reformation. See Griffith, "Covenant in Reformation Theology," 334–50.

[41] By the middle of the nineteenth century, Princeton Theological Seminary had attained worldwide admiration across multi-denominational lines for their commitment to biblical orthodoxy, and for their intentionality to send trained heralds of the gospel of Jesus Christ to every corner of the earth. Iain H. Murray succinctly describes the universal effect that Old Princeton exemplified:

> The Seminary came into existence to prepare heralds of the gospel, to teach them not only what to think but what to believe, and to enforce the lesson that "preaching Christ is the best, hardest, sweetest

championed the core tenets of historic Christianity along with the best of what orthodox Calvinism has to offer.[42] Yet when canvassing the legacy of Old Princeton, arguably no student or professor can be deemed more essential to its flourishing than Charles Hodge.[43] As a premier scholar in the biblical languages and systematic theology, Hodge wrote plentifully on covenant throughout the duration of his academic career.[44] Consider his working definition of covenant contained in the second volume of *Systematic Theology*[45]:

> There can be no doubt that according to its prevailing usage in the Old Testament, [covenant] means a mutual contract between two or more parties. . . . The word בְּרִית when used of transactions between man and man means a mutual compact. We have no right to give it any other sense when used of transactions between God and man. . . . The meaning of the word διαθήκη in the Greek Scriptures is just as certain and uniform. It is derived from the verb διατίθημι, *to arrange*, and, therefore, in ordinary Greek is used for any arrangement, or disposition. . . . That the plan of salvation is presented in the Bible under the form of a covenant is proved not only from the signification and usage of the words above mentioned, but also and more decisively from the fact that the elements of a covenant are included in this plan. There are parties, mutual promises or stipulations, and conditions. So that it is in fact a covenant, whatever it may be called.[46]

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work, on this side of beholding him." . . . [The men of Princeton] came to stand at the forefront of world evangelization. Of the students of the first fifty years—2,422 in number—no less than a third were to be found in mission fields, and we read that W. B. Sprague could say in 1862, 'You can scarcely pause in any country, and look around you, without finding yourself in contact with an evangelizing influence that has emanated from Princeton. (Iain H. Murray, foreword to *Princeton Seminary: Faith & Learning [1812–1868]*, by David B. Calhoun [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994], xv–xvi)

[42] Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, xxiv–xxv.

[43] The foreword and introduction sections of *God, Creation, and Human Rebellion* portray Charles Hodge in an exceptionally lofty manner: "The [life] and literary [legacy] . . . of Charles Hodge (1797–1878) are without peer in the record of American theological education." James M. Garretson, introduction to *God, Creation, and Human Rebellion: Lecture Notes of Archibald Alexander from the Hand of Charles Hodge*, ed. Travis Fentiman (Grand Rapid: Reformation Heritage, 2019), xv.

[44] Francis L. Patton delineates the exegetical and theological brilliance of Hodge in his journal entry, "Charles Hodge," *Presbyterian Review* 6 (1881): 349–77.

[45] Allison describes Hodge (1797–1878) as "theologian, professor, and editor who taught exegesis and theology for more than fifty years at Princeton Theological Seminary. His many writings include commentaries on books of the Bible, a three-volume *Systematic Theology* (1871–1873), and numerous articles in *Biblical Repertoire and Princeton Review*, of which he was editor for several decades." Allison, *Historical Theology*, 747.

[46] Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 2:354.

In conjunction with the Patristic, Medieval, and Reformation writing samples that have been cited thus far, Hodge provides his feedback as to how the Old and New Testament terms for "covenant" ought to be understood. Whether speaking in regard to human-human[47] or divine-human[48] relationships, Hodge believes the Hebrew and Greek *words* for covenant necessitate it being defined as a mutual contract between two or more parties. Yet unlike the case studies from the preceding stages of church history, Hodge notes that the *concept* of covenant can be observed in numerous places where the term is not explicitly mentioned.[49] Therefore, he is aware that "the elements of a covenant" provided in a biblical text—"parties, mutual promises or stipulations, and conditions"—must likewise be explored in addition to employing word studies to acquire a definition of covenant.[50] In other words, as vital as it is to study biblical texts where the words בְּרִית (*berith*) and διαθήκη (*diathéké*) are explicitly situated, it is also paramount to examine passages where the *concept* of covenant is present despite the absence of the word itself. In keeping with various Reformational/Post-Reformational theologians, this distinctive of

[47] To substantiate his exegetical conclusions, Hodge cites Gen 21:27 (the covenant between Abraham and Abimelech); Josh 24:25 (the covenant between Joshua and the people of Israel); 1 Sam 18:3 (the covenant between Jonathan and David); 1 Sam 20:16 (the covenant between Jonathan and the house of David); 1 Kgs 20:34 (the covenant between Ahab and Benhadad). Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:354.

[48] To corroborate his exegetical deductions, Hodge cites Gen 15:18 and 17:13 (the covenant between God and Abraham); the covenant between God and the Israelites at Mount Sinai (as recorded in Exod 19–24). In lieu of citing every divine-human covenant recorded in the Old Testament, Hodge notes, "The Old Testament is founded on this idea of a covenant relationship between God and the theocratic people." Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:354

[49] Unbelieving Bible interpreters—and many evangelical Bible interpreters that adhere to a rigid "Literal-Grammatical-Historical Hermeneutic"—would contest the validity of seeing covenant in a passage of Scripture if the term itself is not explicitly used therein. For an extensive polemic against the aforementioned mindset, see Craig A. Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018).

[50] Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:355. It is interesting to see Hodge argue that God's plan of salvation—accomplished through covenant—is "more decisively" proven from the elements associated with covenant. As important as Hodge believes it is to embrace a correct view of the biblical words for covenant, he is even more insistent on the necessity to adhering to an accurate grasp of the elements linked thereto.

Hodge's ruminations on covenant has directly influenced the definition that will be employed for the remainder of the thesis.

Conclusion (A Proposed Definition of Covenant)

After embarking upon a succinct linguistic analysis of בְּרִית (*berith*) and διαθήκη (*diathéké*), as well as interacting with distinct examples of how covenant has been discerned by Christian theologians for nearly two millennia, it is now appropriate to submit my definition of this term. A covenant is a promise-bound relationship between two or more parties, in which blessings are enjoyed for adhering to the promises of the covenant and penalties are enforced for breaking the promises of the covenant.

As will be seen throughout the remainder of chapter 2, this suggested definition takes into consideration (1) the linguistic connotations of בְּרִית (*berith*) and διαθήκη (*diathéké*)[51]; (2) how human-human,[52] divine-human,[53] and divine-divine[54] covenants are recorded in Scripture; (3) how covenant can be identified when only its elements are

[51] In light of the definition being proposed for covenant in this thesis, consider the meanings previously transcribed for בְּרִית (*berith*) and διαθήκη (*diathéké*) on pp. 32–33. Specifically, "to pledge," "to make an arrangement," and "to make a commitment."

[52] Thomas R. Schreiner notes that human-human covenants contain "binding promises" that "are made in a relational context." Moreover, in addition to the promissory dimensions of human-human covenants, Schreiner observes that such relationships also entail a mutual decision to enter into the covenant. In doing so, each party involved in the covenant "pledges to carry out the stipulations or the requirements of the covenant." Although not all covenants are "precisely the same," Schreiner concludes that these basic factors will be present when perusing *any* human-human covenant. Thomas R. Schreiner, *Covenant and God's Purpose for the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 13–14.

[53] The divine-human covenants disclosed in the Bible are the Covenant of Works, the Covenant of Grace, the Noahic Covenant, the Abrahamic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, the Davidic Covenant, and the New Covenant. In the process of explaining the biblical-theological underpinnings of each of these covenants throughout chap. 2, it will also be argued that the Covenant of Grace *is* the New Covenant.

[54] The mentioning of a "divine-divine covenant" is a reference to the Covenant of Redemption, signifying the eternal self-determination of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit to redeem an elect remnant of sinners. Thus, the Covenant of Redemption is a "divine-divine" covenant *in the sense* that it is an eternal agreement amongst the Trinitarian persons. The biblical, theological, and historical contours of the Covenant of Redemption receive sizeable attention in this chapter.

present in a biblical text and not simply the word[55]; and (4) how Christians have regarded covenant within post-Reformation milieus.[56] Hence forth, the antecedent definition is how the remainder of chapter 2—and the remainder of this thesis—will portray covenant.

The Necessity of Covenant

Cultivating awareness of covenant's biblical and theological significance is not exhausted by word or conceptual studies. As with all matters pertaining to the Christian faith, until a doctrine is scrutinized through a God-centered lens, one will not achieve a full-

[55] As alluded to in the quotation from Hodge, there are instances in Scripture where a covenant is being described, yet the word "covenant" is not explicitly used in the immediate context (i.e., the Covenant of Works in Gen 2:15–17; the Davidic Covenant in 2 Sam 7:8–16). However, on such occasions, the *elements* of covenant are clearly identifiable (promises made between two or more parties, along with the mentioning of blessings/penalties for adherence/violation of those promises), and other parts of God's Word clarify that a covenant was enacted (i.e., the Covenant of Works described in Isa 24:1–6 and Hos 6:7; the Davidic Covenant described in Ps 89:3–4, 19–37). Dismissing the presence of covenant on the basis of the absence of the word "covenant" is tantamount to dismissing God's triune nature on the basis of the lack of the word "Trinity." The elements of both covenant and Trinity are replete throughout Scripture, even if the term is not explicitly used in a given context.

[56] When compared with the samples provided from the Patristic, Medieval, Reformation, and Modern eras of church history, the definition for covenant that has been presented in this chapter—and will be presupposed for the remainder of the thesis—is harmonious with how the Particular Baptist tradition has regarded covenant for the past five centuries (i.e., one of the prominent post-Reformation milieus in church history). The following extracts attest to this reality. Samuel Richardson (1602–1658) notes, "The word *covenant*, imports a mutual agreement of two parties to perform each of them the things agreed upon; for it cannot be a Covenant, unless there be something to be done on both parties." Samuel Richardson, quoted in James M. Renihan, "Covenant Theology in the First and Second London Baptist Confession," in *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage: Essays in Baptist Covenant Theology*, ed. Richard C. Barcellos (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic, 2014), 54. John Gill (1697–1771) explains, "[In covenant], persons, of their own will and choice, enter [and] choose the persons to be concerned with them, the terms and conditions on which they covenant with each other, and the things and persons they covenant about." John Gill, quoted in Daniel D. Scheiderer, "John Gill and the Continuing Baptist Affirmation of the Eternal Covenant," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 25, no. 1 (2021): 65–90. James P. Boyce (1827–1888) writes, "A covenant is an agreement between two or more parties by which any one or more things are to be done under the sanction of rewards and penalties." James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Hanford, CA: Den Dulk Christian Foundation, 2000), 235. Schreiner writes, "A covenant is a chosen relationship in which two parties make binding promises to each other." Schreiner, *Covenant and God's Purpose*, 13. Renihan notes,

> A covenant . . . is a guaranteed commitment. Two parties make commitments to one another. Their commitments are often summed up in "I will, you will" statements. Different covenants have different kinds of commitments, and the varying kinds of commitments in these covenants result in different kinds of covenants. A commitment, in and of itself, however, is not a covenant. Sanctions or threats must be put into place to guarantee the fulfillments of the parties' commitments. This adds a degree of legality and formality that a generic commitment would not carry. (Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 40–41)

orbed picture of its meaning.[57] Thus, since theology is, literally, the study of God and all things in relation to him,[58] the central aim of doctrine is divinely oriented. Fundamentally, as is the case with all doctrinal speculation, a proper cognizance of covenant cannot be divorced from its link to the triune God.[59] Thus, it is fitting to now explore how God—as necessary being—establishes the basis for the redemptive-historical necessity of covenant.

Covenant Is Rooted within God's *Ad Intra* Life

God's necessity of being is eloquently expressed in chapter 2 of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689): "Of God and the Holy Trinity."[60] Although

[57] Horton summarizes the essentiality of tethering all doctrinal inquires to a divinely informed viewpoint: "Since God is the author of reality, it is his interpretation [of reality] that we must pursue." Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 15.

[58] Norman L. Geisler explains that "theology (lit. *theos*, "God," and *logos*, "reason" or "discourse") is a rational discourse about God." Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Baker, 2011), 13.

[59] Bavinck posits that all covenants in time are grounded in "a stable, eternal foundation in the counsel of God." Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 212–13. As such, it logically follows that covenant is a redemptive-historical corollary of the triune God's necessary and eternal existence.

[60] The following paragraphs encapsulate the totality of chap. 2 of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689):

> Paragraph 1: The Lord our God is one, the only living and true God. He is self-existent and infinite in being and perfection. His essence cannot be understood by anyone but him. He is a perfectly pure spirit. He is invisible and has no body, parts, or changeable emotions. He alone has immortality, dwelling in light that no one can approach. He is unchangeable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, in every way infinite, absolutely holy, perfectly wise, wholly free, completely absolute. He works all things according to the counsel of his own unchangeable and completely righteous will for his own glory. He is most loving, gracious, merciful, and patient. He overflows with goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. He rewards those who seek him diligently. At the same time, he is perfectly just and terrifying in his judgments. He hates all sin, and will certainly not clear the guilty.
>
> Paragraph 2: God has all life, glory, goodness, and blessedness in and of himself; he alone is all-sufficient in himself. He does not need any creature he has made nor does he derive any glory from them. Instead, he demonstrates his own glory in them, by them, to them, and upon them. He alone is the source of all being, and everything is from him, through him, and to him. He has absolute sovereign rule over all creatures, to act through them, for them, or upon them as he pleases. In his sight everything is open and visible. His knowledge is infinite and infallible. It does not depend upon any creature, so for him nothing is contingent or uncertain. He is absolutely holy in all his plans, in all his works, and

originating from the Particular Baptist theological tradition, this portion of the confession epitomizes how Christians have historically conceived of God's necessity of being.[61] When reflecting on the contents of general revelation (Ps 19:1–6; Rom 1:18–20), creation's inherent contingency necessitates the existence of an absolute and eternal being.[62] Furthermore, upon surveying the details of special revelation (Ps 19:7–14; 2 Tim 3:16–17), it is apparent that an absolute and eternal being exists: the God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[63]

> in all his commands. Angels and human beings owe to him all the worship, service, or obedience that creatures owe to the Creator and whatever else he is pleased to require of them.
>
> Paragraph 3: This divine and infinite Being consists of three real persons, the Father, the Word or Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three have the same substance, power, and eternity, each having the whole divine essence without this essence being divided. The Father is not derived from anyone, neither begotten nor proceeding. The Son is eternally begotten of the Father. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. All three are infinite and without beginning and are therefore only one God, who is not to be divided in nature and being. Yet these three are distinguished by several distinctive characteristics and personal relations. This truth of the Trinity is the foundation of all of our fellowship with God and of our comforting dependence on him. (The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith in Modern English, "Chapter 2-God and the Holy Trinity," Founders Ministries, accessed July 15, 2022, https://founders.org/library/1689-confession/chapter-2-god-and-the-holy-trinity/)

[61] James E. Dolezal references the following doctrinal statements to trace the ecumenical consensus on illuminating God's necessity of being: the Belgic Confession, Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, Westminster Confession of Faith, and Second London Baptist Confession of Faith. For Dolezal, this historical assessment solidifies the bedrock of "classical Christian theism." James E. Dolezal, *All That Is in God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2017), 1.

[62] Turretin sagaciously unpacks how general revelation (i.e., man's use of reason) testifies to the contingency of creation, thereby accentuating the existence of a God who is necessary being:

> Nature proves the being of God since she proclaims that she not only is, but is from another and could not be without another. For if it is certain and indubitable that out of nothing, nothing is made and that nothing can be the cause of itself (for then it would be before and after itself), it is also certain that we must grant some first and unproduced being from whom all things are, but who is himself from no one. For if every being is produced, it is produced either by itself or by some other; not by itself because (as was just said) nothing can be the cause of itself; not by another because then it would follow that there could be an infinite series in producing causes. (Francis Turretin, *First through Tenth Topics*, vol. 1 of *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed.James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1992], 170)

[63] Across the pages of the Old and New Testaments, God has clearly revealed himself as one necessary being (Deut 6:4; 32:39; Isa 44:8; 1 Cor 8:6), who eternally exists as Father (Rom 15:6; 2 Cor 1:3–4; 1 Pet 1:3), Son (Acts 20:28; Rom 9:5; Titus 2:13), and Holy Spirit (Ps 95:3, 8–9; cf. Heb 3:7–11; Acts 5:3–4). For more on God's progressive revelation of his Trinitarian nature, see Mark Jones, *God Is: A Devotional Guide to the Attributes of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 21–29.

This absolute and eternal being—the triune God of Christianity—is both the source of all things in existence (Rom 11:35–36), and the archetype for the being and activity of image-bearing creatures (Gen 1:26–28).[64] In Scripture, one of the key revelations about God's archetypal eternal life is portrayed in the "covenant of redemption."[65] While a plethora of post-Reformation theologians have mused over this doctrine for centuries,[66] Samuel Renihan explicates a distinctively Particular Baptist perspective on the covenant of redemption in *The Mystery of Christ: His Covenant and His Kingdom*:

> The New Covenant announced by the Messiah was established on a preceding covenantal foundation. That covenantal foundation is the Covenant of Redemption. In 2 Timothy 1:9, Paul teaches that salvation is the result of a purpose given in Christ Jesus "before the ages began." In Titus 1:2, Paul says that eternal life was promised "before the ages began." Scripture presents that eternal purpose and promise of salvation to mankind metaphorically in the mode of a covenant transacted between the parties of the Trinity.[67]

Every divine-human covenant that unfolds in redemptive history—including the promise of salvation in the New Covenant—is ultimately based on the covenant of redemption: a

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[64] Lane G. Tipton, *The Trinitarian Theology of Cornelius Van Til* (Philadelphia: Reformed Forum, 2022), 18.

[65] Several passages can be mentioned in discussing the biblical basis for the covenant of redemption. In effort to provide the most *explicit* evidence for the covenant of redemption, consider the following biblical texts: Isa 42:1–7; 50:4–9 (cf. Luke 4:17–21); Luke 22:28–30; John 17:4–6; 2 Tim 1:9; Titus 1:1–3. As an aside, it is crucial to note that the covenant of redemption is not necessary to God's being, nor is it to be univocally equated with God's *ad intra* life (i.e., it was not necessary for God to create the world nor author a plan of redemptive history). Rather, though eternally and internally formulated within the Godhead, the covenant of redemption is a subset of the divine decree specifically in reference to God's *ad extra* works in creation. Or to further summarize, God is necessary but his work—including the covenant of redemption—is not.

[66] Although it is derived from biblical exegesis and necessary theological consequences, the covenant of redemption is a predominantly post-Reformation doctrine. Through their attentiveness to historical theology, Guy M. Richard and Bruce P. Baugus both confirm this reality. See Guy M. Richard, "The Covenant of Redemption," in Waters, Reid, and Muether, *Covenant Theology*, 43–62; Bruce P. Baugus, "Covenant Theology in the Dutch Reformed Tradition," in Waters, Reid, and Muether, *Covenant Theology*, 379–400. Furthermore, Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones unveil how the covenant of redemption was perceived in the theology of the Puritans. Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012), 237–58. In conclusion, the covenant of redemption is a well-received biblical and theological distinctive—across multi-denominational lines—in the generations subsequent to the Protestant Reformation.

[67] Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 152.

divine-divine covenant eternally transacted between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.[68] Given the simplicity of the divine essence, and given the necessity of analogical language in speech about God, the notion of blessing and cursing cannot be *properly* predicated to the Most High.[69] Nevertheless, theologians have regarded the covenant of redemption as the eternal self-determination of the triune God to accomplish the redemption of an elect remnant of hell-bound sinners[70] to the praise of his glorious grace.[71] Although the Trinity is ontologically indivisible[72]—and works inseparably in all

[68] The mechanics of the intratrinitarian covenant of redemption are explored by Turretin:

> As this work is eternal, it is common and undivided to the whole Trinity with this distinction, however—that each person has his own proper and peculiar mode of operation here, agreeable to this saving economy (1 Pet. 1:2). God, the Father, concurs in it because he first instituted this method of communicating himself and gave his Son in virtue of that constitution (Jn. 3:16). He invites to communion with him, first by the prophets, then by his son, finally by his apostles and ministers and sends the Holy Spirit to apply the covenant (Gal. 4:6). (Turretin, *Eleventh through Seventeenth Topics*, 175)

[69] The ideas expressed in this footnote's corresponding sentence were largely informed by Kyle Claunch's feedback during the defense of this thesis on January 24, 2025.

[70] The covenant of redemption has two sides: One side is God's gracious determination to save some sinners from his wrath due their sins (i.e., "election"), whereas the other side is God's just determination to allow some sinners to bear his wrath due their sins (i.e., "reprobation"). As with all the details of God's decree, these are *logical* distinctions for the purpose of enabling finite humans to affirm truths about the decree established by an eternal and infinite God. However, as experienced within God himself, the decree is one all-comprehending plan. Hodge is especially clarifying on this point: "The view [of God's decree] is rendered necessary by the nature of an infinitely perfect Being. It is inconsistent with the idea of absolute perfection, that the purposes of God are successive, or that he ever purposes what he did not originally intend; or that one part of his plan is independent of other parts. It is one scheme, and therefore one purpose." Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 1:537.

[71] Question and Answer 1 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism summarizes the prime reason for human existence: "Question: What is the chief end of man? Answer: Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever." "Westminster Shorter Catechism," Christian Classics Ethereal Library, accessed August 2, 2022, https://ccel.org/ccel/anonymous/westminster1/westminster1.i.i.html. In supplementation to the Westminster Shorter Catechism's declaration, Scott Christensen argues that the central purpose for *creation itself* is the supreme glorification of God: "God's ultimate purpose in freely creating the world is to supremely magnify the riches of his glory to all his creatures, especially human beings, who alone bear his image." Scott Christensen, *What About Evil? A Defense of God's Sovereign Glory* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2020), 282.

[72] Samuel Renihan lucidly describes God's ontological indivisibility through his treatment of divine simplicity:

> There is no composition, cause, succession, or imperfection in God. If there is nothing that causes God's existence, if God does not exist in successive moments, and if nothing can perfect the perfect God, then God is incapable of change. . . . No perfection can be added to God which he did not

operations carried out in creation[73]—each person of the Godhead plays a specific role in actualizing the covenant of redemption's stipulations.[74]

The Father willingly commissions the Son to enter into a fallen world (1 John 4:14), live a perfect life (Matt 5:17), die a penal substitutionary atoning death on the cross for the elect (2 Cor 5:21), be resurrected from the dead three days after crucifixion (Acts 13:34–39), and ascend to Heaven thereafter (Acts 1:9–11). The Son willingly accepts the Father's commission because it is the delight of the Son to enact the works that the Father has given unto him (John 6:38). And upon the Son's impeccable completion of what the Father commissioned him to do in the fullness of times (Gal 4:4–5), the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son to apply the covenant of redemption's benefits to the elect (John 16:13–15), as wrought by the Son's earthly obedience to the Father's will (Rom 5:10–11). As consummately manifested in the covenant of redemption, the overflow of love eternally experienced within God's *ad intra* life yields a created order in which man is ushered into enjoying such love for himself.[75] Indeed, the intratrinitarian covenant of

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> already have, neither can there be a process of moments and actions by virtue of which this change could take place. . . . For this reason, when God says that his name is I AM WHO I AM, and that he is the same yesterday, today, and forever, we believe it. (Samuel Renihan, *Deity & Decree* [Los Angeles: self-published, 2020], 46–47)

[73] Fred G. Zaspel argues that "central to God's self-revelation is his *unity* (Deut. 6:4): he is one, and he is the only one." Fred G. Zaspel, *The Theology of B. B. Warfield: A Systematic Summary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 179–80. Following this line of reasoning, because of God's singularity of being, all of God's works outside of himself in creation must be numerically one (*opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*). Historically, this biblical and theological conclusion has been termed "the doctrine of inseparable operations." For a book length treatment on this subject, see Adonis Vidu, *The Same God Who Works All Things: Inseparable Operations in Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids: William. B. Eerdmans, 2021).

[74] Herman Bavinck offers an expansive treatment of the peculiar roles carried out by God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Herman Bavinck, *The Wonderful Works of God: Instruction in the Christian Religion According to the Reformed Confession*, trans. Henry Zylstra (Glenside, PA: Westminster Seminary, 2019), 248–50.

[75] R. C. Sproul Jr. carefully teases out the mystery of God's *ad intra* life prior to the creation of the *cosmos*. Sproul's commentary on the "full bucket problem" gets to the heart of how creation is organically manufactured from the blissful communion enjoyed within the Godhead. R. C. Sproul Jr., *Almighty Over All: Understanding the Sovereignty of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 31–37. Sproul writes,

> Before creation, God's "bucket" was full. He lacked nothing. So why did he act? The traditional solution to this vexing question turns the problem on its head; it turns the bucket upside down.

redemption is the divinely ordained pattern after which all divine-human relations are founded.[76]

Covenant Undergirds God's *Ad Extra* Work within Creation

The earliest divine-human relationship described in the Bible is contained in the first three chapters of Genesis. Chapter 4 of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689) carefully elucidates the parameters of that primeval relationship between God and man from a post-Reformation, Baptistic perspective:[77]

> In the beginning God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit was pleased to create or make the world and all things in it, both visible and invisible, in a six-day period, and all very good. He did this to manifest the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness. After God had made all the other creatures, he created humanity. He made them male and female, with rational and immortal souls, thereby making them suited to that life lived unto God for which they were created. They were made in the image of God, being endowed with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness. They had the law of God written in their hearts and the power to fulfill it. Even so, they could still transgress the law, because they were left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject to change. In addition to the law written in their hearts, they received a command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As long as

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> Theologians have reasoned that God created because of the fullness of his bucket, because of the fullness of his glory. The reason for the creation in God's case was not a lack but a fullness. God's glory overflowed the bucket. It needed an arena, a theater for its display, and thus the creation came to pass. (36)

[76] According to Beeke and Jones, it was not uncommon for post-Reformation theologians to see God's *ad extra* dealings with humanity as ectypal of the covenant of redemption entrenched in God's *ad intra* life: "The Reformed orthodox in particular used the covenant of redemption as an argument for the *ad intra* Trinitarian grounding for the *ad extra* work of salvation. Therefore, this doctrine provides the starting point of any discussion of God's soteric purposes in the history of redemption." Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 237. To substantiate the aforementioned quote, Beeke and Jones utilize Herman Witsius (1636–1708) and David Dickson (c. 1583–1662) as corroborating evidence from the post-Reformation era. As evidenced from this chapter, the thesis shares the convictions espoused by those men.

[77] As stated in chap. 1, the emphasis of this thesis is to present a treatment on the intersection of covenant, canon, and cessationism from a framework consistent with sixteenth and seventeenth century Particular Baptist Federalism. To that end, the working definition of "covenant" provided in this chapter stands in continuity with the theological distinctives of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689): a staple of Particular Baptist Federalism, developed in the century following the Protestant Reformation. This historic creed is crucial to elucidating how the Bible depicts key theological contours of Scripture, including the doctrine of covenant and the Creator-creature relation.

they obeyed this command, they were happy in their communion with God and had dominion over the creatures.[78]

Insofar this ancient creed is faithful to Scripture, the protological divine-human relationship was marked by *at least* these distinctives:

1. During the creation week,[79] God made all things in the visible and invisible realms "very good" (Gen 1:31–2:4).[80]

2. The chief purpose for which God brought forth the *cosmos ex nihilo* was to glorify the excellency of his own being (Isa 48:9–11).[81]

3. Man was the final creature made by the triune God (Gen 1:26).[82]

4. Man was originally created male and female with a physical body and an immaterial soul "suited" for accomplishing God's purpose for their existence (Gen 2:7).[83]

5. By virtue of being created in the "image of God," man was endowed with intrinsic knowledge of God, positive righteousness before God, and personal holiness (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10).[84]

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[78] The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith in Modern English, "Chapter 4-Creation," Founders Ministries, July 23, 2022, https://founders.org/library/1689-confession/chapter-4-creation/.

[79] Although the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689) describes the creation week as occurring "in a six-day period," there has been debate amongst Christians—across multi-denominational lines—as to whether or not each day in the Genesis creation narrative should be interpreted as literal 24-hour days. Within the bounds of Christian orthodoxy, various positions have been postulated to construct a cosmogeny that harmonizes the best of what can be found in general and special revelation. For a book length treatment on competing creation-based convictions, see J. Ligon Duncan et al., *The Genesis Debate: Three Views on the Days of Creation*, ed. David G. Hagopian (Mission Viejo, CA: Crux, 2001).

[80] Observation 1 is commentary on the first sentence found in the excerpt on p. 49 of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689): "In the beginning God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit was pleased to create or make the world and all things in it, both visible and invisible, in a six-day period, and all very good."

[81] Observation 2 is commentary on the second sentence found in the excerpt on p. 49 of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689): "He did this to manifest the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness."

[82] Observation 3 is commentary on the third sentence found in the excerpt on p. 49 of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689): "After God had made all the other creatures, he created humanity."

[83] Observation 4 is commentary on the fourth sentence found in the excerpt on p. 49 of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689): "He made them male and female, with rational and immortal souls, thereby making them suited to that life lived unto God for which they were created."

[84] Observation 5 is commentary on the fifth sentence found in the excerpt on p. 49 of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689): "They were made in the image of God, being endowed with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness."

6. As a necessary consequence of bearing the *imago Dei*, the law of God was written on man's heart in conjunction with the bestowal of a creaturely volition (Rom 1:32).[85]

7. Man's creatureliness necessitated a will that possessed the potential to either obey or disobey the divine statutes transcribed on his heart: general revelation (Gen 3:6).[86]

8. The volition of man rendered him capable of obeying or disobeying the direct commandment given by God to not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil: special revelation (Gen 2:17a).[87]

9. As a special act of providence, God promises man everlasting and eschatological communion with him as a result of freely obeying the commandment to not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Gen 2:17b).[88]

While these nine observations by no means *exhaust* the totality of the primordial relationship between God and man, they are nonetheless foundational to proving how covenant undergirds God's *ad extra* work within creation.[89] In the prelapsarian estate, God embedded structures within nature that not only enabled man to understand his relationship to the world, but also revealed truth about the Creator's existence and requirements for image bearing creatures (Rom 1:18–21).[90] As mediated through general revelation, man's knowledge of his God—and man's knowledge of his obligations to

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[85] Observation 6 is commentary on the sixth sentence found in the excerpt on p. 49 of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689): "They had the law of God written in their hearts and the power to fulfill it."

[86] Observation 7 is commentary on the seventh sentence found in the excerpt on p. 49 of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689): "Even so, they could still transgress the law, because they were left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject to change."

[87] Observation 8 is commentary on the eighth sentence found in the excerpt on p. 49 of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689): "In addition to the law written in their hearts, they received a command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."

[88] Observation 9 is commentary on the ninth sentence found in the excerpt on p. 49 of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689): "As long as they obeyed this command, they were happy in their communion with God and had dominion over the creatures."

[89] Berkhof defines God's *ad extra* works as "those activities and effects by which the Trinity is manifested outwardly. These are never works of one person exclusively, but always works of the Divine Being as a whole." Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 89.

[90] In an effort to provide a working definition for "general revelation"—as used in this context and in the entirety of the thesis—consider how it is conveyed in the Glossary of Terms of *Exploring Christian Theology*: "Revelation of God given to all people at all times, such as through creation (Rom. 1:19–20) and through conscience (Rom. 2:15)." Nathan D. Holsteen and Michael J. Svigel, eds., *Revelation, Scripture, and the Triune God*, vol. 1 of *Exploring Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2014), 260.

God—were concurrent with his existence (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10).[91] That is to say, man's identity as an image-bearing creature necessitated natural religious fellowship with the living God.[92]

However, the sinless bliss enjoyed in the Garden of Eden was not the ultimate *telos* unto which man's natural religious fellowship with God was oriented (1 Cor 15:45).[93] As wonderful as it was to reside in a prelapsarian world, man was not an innately glorified being and no amount of effort could enable him to advance to eschatological life (1 Cor

[91] Upon reflecting on the relationship between man's inherent knowledge of God—and man's inherent knowledge of self—John Calvin famously argues that "the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves are bound together by a mutual tie." John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2015), 6. Whether speaking of the pre-fall or post-fall creation, this is an architectonic component of divine-human relations.

[92] Man's creation in the image of God cannot be separated from dwelling in a bond of natural communion with his Creator. Lane G. Tipton notes,

> Adam, being made in the image of God, was created in a natural bond of religious fellowship with God, consisting in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. As such, Adam, in his natural constitution, was oriented toward God and placed in an environment—the garden and mountain of God—that was also oriented toward the same end. Adam was intended to be a mountain-ascending worshiper of the true and living God. (Lane G. Tipton, *Foundations of Covenant Theology: A Biblical-Theological Study of Genesis 1–3* [Philadelphia: Reformed Forum, 2021], 74)

[93] In his efforts to ascertain a full-orbed portrait of man's foremost purpose for existing *coram Deo*, Geerhardus Vos draws the following biblical and theological conclusions:

> Man had been created perfectly good in a moral sense. And yet there was a sense in which he could be raised to a still higher level of perfection. On the surface this seems to involve a contradiction. It will be removed by closely marking the aspect in regard to which the advance was contemplated. The advance was meant to be from unconfirmed to confirmed goodness and blessedness; to the confirmed state in which these possessions could no longer be lost, a state in which man could no longer sin, and hence could no longer become subject to the consequences of sin. Man's original state was a state of indefinite probation: he remained in possession of what he had, so long as he did not commit sin, but it was not a state in which the continuance of his religious and moral status could be guaranteed him. In order to assure this for him, he had to be subjected to an intensified, concentrated probation, in which, if he remained standing, the status of probation would be forever left behind. The provision of this new, higher prospect for man was an act of condescension and high favour. (Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2007], 22)

Roughly two centuries before Vos, Thomas Boston (1676–1732) set forth similar arguments. Boston found that man's original state of being created "able to sin, able not to sin" (*posse peccare*, *posse non peccare*) was not qualitatively equivalent to man's anthropological experience as a glorified creature: "unable to sin" (*non posse peccare*). As such, the attainment to eschatological life was the divinely intended *telos* for man's natural religious fellowship with his Creator. Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State* (Colorado Springs: CreateSpace, 2015).

15:50).[94] Therefore, it pleased God to extend the promise of eschatological life to humanity through the covenant of works (Gen 2:16–17; Isa 24:1–6; Hos 6:7).[95] The covenant of works was a promise-bound relationship between God and Adam, but its outcome would affect all to ever descend from Adam by natural generation (Rom 5:12–21; 1 Cor 15:21–22).[96] The terms of the covenant were twofold: (1) If man ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, he would be faced with the *lowest quality* of existence

[94] G. K. Beale belabors man's inability to secure eschatological life through his own efforts. G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 43–45. In conclusion, man's Edenic condition was merely a foretaste of what would be cherished with God had he modeled faithfulness to the covenant of works (i.e., the promise of obedience to God's command to not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil).

[95] Although he does not favor the terminology "covenant of works," Anthony Hoekema explicitly ties God's promise of eschatological life to the relationship established between himself and Adam in the Garden of Eden:

> This much is clear: the integrity in which Adam and Eve existed before the Fall was not a state of consummate and unchangeable perfection. Man, to be sure, was created in the image of God at the beginning, but he was not yet a "finished product." He still needed to grow and to be tested. God wished to determine whether man would be obedient to him freely and voluntarily, in the face of an actual possibility of disobedience. For this reason God gave Adam a "probationary command": "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die" (Gen. 2:16–17). (Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994], 83)

[96] When viewed through the lens of church history, the covenant of works provides the most biblically and theologically cogent rationale for why sin has universally impacted the human race. The covenant of works explains the origins of—and the basis for—mankind's radical corruption, and explicates why death exists in the first place. As evidenced in the previous footnote, it is certainly possible to adhere to many (or all) of the truths espoused in historic developments of the covenant of works without embracing the specific terminology. For the purposes of accentuating a few case studies, consider G. C. Berkouwer, *Sin*, trans. Philip C. Holtrop (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980); Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free, 1966); and John Murray, "The Adamic Administration," in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977). Each of these resources are cited in Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 119. While each of those works do not explicitly endorse the designation "covenant of works," many of the theological distinctives thereof are affirmed by these Reformed theologians. Given this thesis's commitment to a Particular Baptistic theological framework, the covenant of works label will be employed throughout this chapter for the purpose of maintaining consistency with that respective confessional heritage. To encounter premier scholarship supporting the biblical and theological basis for the covenant of works, see J. V. Fesko, *The Covenant of Works: The Origins, Development, and Reception of the Doctrine* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2020); Harrison Perkins, *Catholicity and the Covenant of Works: James Ussher and the Reformed Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2020); David VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order: A Biblical Theology of Natural Law* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2014); Cornelis P. Venema, *Christ and Covenant Theology: Essays on Election, Republication, and the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2017).

proper to his species: spiritual and physical death.[97] (2) If man did not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, he would be granted the *highest quality* of existence proper to his species: spiritual and physical life.[98]

Tragically, man's failure in the covenant of works would plunge the entire race into a history marked by sin, suffering, and death (Rom 3:23; 6:23; 8:22). Yet in accordance with the riches of God's grace, the promise of eschatological life has been freely extended to humanity through the medium of postlapsarian covenants.[99] The covenant of redemption—rooted within God's *ad intra* life—solidifies the great plan of redemption that God brings to pass through the unfolding of divine-human covenants, culminating in the covenant of grace wrought through the work of Jesus Christ (Jer 31:31–34; Luke 22:20; Heb 8:8–13).[100] As developed below, an examination of God's great plan of

[97] The Bible is clear that after man broke the covenant of works in the Garden of Eden, he immediately experienced spiritual death (Gen 6:5; cf. Eph 2:1–3) and would eventually go on to experience physical death (Gen 5:1–32; cf. Heb 9:27). However, physical death and spiritual death do not necessitate a cessation of man's existence (Rev 20:11–15). Rather, if a man dies in a condition of spiritual deadness, he goes on to spend eternity bearing God's wrath for the transgressions committed against him (2 Thess 1:6–10). Therefore, it can be rightly said that eternal residence in Hell—the final destination for all who face physical death in their condition of spiritual deadness—epitomizes the *lowest quality* of existence proper to humanity.

[98] In contrast to the preceding footnote, man's obedience to the covenant of works would entail glorification and the eternal reception of eschatological life with his Creator. In doing so, man would enter into a condition wherein he would be unable to sin (*non posse peccare*). The aggregate of the biblical record indicates that all believers will attain this anthropological state at the time of their earthly death, or at the moment of Jesus Christ's return (whichever occurs first; cf. 1 John 3:2). Therefore, it can be affirmed through good and necessary consequences that glorification—everlasting physical life and the fullness of spiritual life—embodies the *highest quality* of existence proper to mankind.

[99] Michael D. Williams situates the totality of postlapsarian history under the umbrella of covenant: "God's revelation of his response to sin and its effects upon humankind and the world takes place not in an instant but rather over centuries, through a series of redemptive historical acts. These special [post-Fall] events in the biblical story are often characterized by covenant making or are otherwise typified as covenantal in character." Michael D. Williams, *Far as the Curse Is Found: The Covenant Story of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2005), xii.

[100] The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith in Modern English irons out how God's plan of redeeming sinful man is accomplished by way of covenant:

> Paragraph 2: Since humanity brought itself under the curse of the law by its fall, it pleased the Lord to make a covenant of grace. In this covenant he freely offers to sinners life and salvation through Jesus Christ. On their part he requires faith in him, that they may be saved, and promises to give his Holy Spirit to all who are ordained to eternal life, to make them willing and able to believe.

redemption, as progressively revealed through Scripture's postlapsarian divine-human covenants, is offered in tandem with the manner whereby covenant functions.

The Function of Covenant

From Genesis to Revelation, the reader is confronted with a cosmic drama of how God supremely glorifies himself by redeeming an elect remnant of sinners through the person and work of Jesus Christ.[101] Yet, God does not work out his illustrious story in a vacuum; the salvation of sinners does not occur randomly or whimsically.[102] Rather, God sovereignly and intentionally enables sinful man to be reconciled to himself—and come to an advanced knowledge of himself—through the medium of covenant.[103] In the final analysis, there are *at least* two functions of covenant in a postlapsarian world.

> Paragraph 3: This covenant is revealed in the gospel. It was revealed first of all to Adam in the promise of salvation through the seed of the woman. After that, it was revealed step by step until the full revelation of it was completed in the New Testament. This covenant is based on the eternal covenant transaction between the Father and the Son concerning the redemption of the elect. Only through the grace of this covenant have those saved from among the descendants of fallen Adam obtained life and blessed immortality. Humanity is now utterly incapable of being accepted by God on the same terms on which Adam was accepted in his state of innocence. (The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith in Modern English, "Chapter 7–God's Covenant," Founders Ministries, July 23, 2022, https://founders.org/library/1689-confession/chapter-7-gods-covenant/)

[101] Kevin J. Vanhoozer richly evokes the drama of redemption: "The subject matter of the Bible, and hence of Christian faith and thought, is intrinsically dramatic. . . . What the church seeks to understand [in Scripture] is essentially a true story: the history of God's dealings with his creatures." Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "A Drama-Of-Redemption Model," in *Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry and Gary T. Meadors (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 155.

[102] J. I. Packer aptly summarizes salvation as "covenant salvation: justification and adoption, regeneration and sanctification are covenant mercies; election was God's choice of future members of his covenant community, the church." In other words, salvation according to the Bible is inherently covenantal. J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1993), 89–90.

[103] D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899–1981) unambiguously ascribes covenant as the sole means whereby sinful man can enjoy a filial relationship with his holy Creator:

> Man, having failed to keep God's law and commandment, became the slave of Satan, dead in trespasses and sins, and [had] he been left to himself his condition would have been entirely hopeless. But God, in His infinite grace and love and mercy, looked upon man in pity, and informed him of His great plan of salvation. . . . God revealed it to man in the form of a covenant. . . . [Covenant is] the way in which God has made known His gracious purpose to save man from the guilt and pollution which resulted from [sin]. (D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Great Doctrines of the Bible* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012], 224)

First, covenant mediates special revelation from God to man, resulting in the justification, sanctification, and eventual glorification of elect sinners.[104] While many people have refused to submit themselves to God's special revelation throughout history—or were simply never exposed thereto—the special revelation affixed to covenant inevitably yields faith, repentance, and spiritual perseverance amongst elect men and women (Heb 12:1–2).[105] At the time designated from before the foundation of the world, Christ's sheep hear his voice through the testimony of special revelation and come to be made members of the covenant of grace by faith alone (John 10:14–18).[106] Salvation is a wonderful byproduct of covenant's preliminary function.

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[104] By definition, every divine-human covenant is special revelation. As previously stated in the thesis, special revelation is God directly and unmistakably communicating with man to enable the creature to understand—or perform a specific task within—the created order. Although all sinners who are exposed to God's special revelation do not ultimately come to saving faith, when the Holy Spirit is pleased to effectually draw a sinner to saving faith in Jesus Christ, he uses the special revelation that is intended to make God known to man and direct them to the Gospel (Rom 10:17). The necessary entailment of coming to saving faith (justification) through exposure to special revelation is further conformity into the moral likeness of Jesus Christ (sanctification), which consummates in glorification on the Last Day (Phil 3:20–21; 1 John 3:2; 2 Pet 1:4). Indeed, through the outworking of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the elect, the special revelation of divine-human covenants organically bestows every spiritual blessing to them in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:28–39; Eph 1:3).

[105] The first function of covenant being outlined at this juncture concentrates on the efficacy of special revelation—of which is indivisible from divine-human covenants—to bring about salvation and spiritual growth in God's elect. In accordance with God's eternal decree, non-elect sinners either reject the special revelation they are exposed to in this life (e.g., Luke 8:4–7, 9–14), or they simply were never given the opportunity to be exposed to special revelation (e.g., Rom 2:12a). Regardless, God's impartial judgement of non-elect humanity will be commensurate with their sin committed against the backdrop of the light of nature. R. C. Sproul soberly assesses this feature of the final judgment:

> Since the [final] judgment will be perfectly just, the Scriptures make clear that it will be rendered according to the light we have. . . . Jesus came to people who were already under God's indictment—not for rejecting Jesus, whom they did not know, but for rejecting the Father, whom they did know by the revelation that He has given in nature. Even if we did not have the Bible, the heavens declare God's glory (Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:20). Indeed, our very consciences bear witness that we know who God is and that we have violated His law (Rom. 2:15). (R. C. Sproul, *Everyone's a Theologian: An Introduction to Systematic Theology* [Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2014], 327)

[106] As explained later in chap. 2, all who will ever be saved throughout redemptive history will have been saved through the potency of the New Covenant (i.e., the Covenant of Grace). Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—the mediator of the New Covenant (Heb 9:15)—has always been the requirement to experience salvation (Gen 3:15; Rom 16:20). From Genesis to Revelation, salvation has always been by God's grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone (1 Tim 2:5–6). Just as believers have looked back in faith to the once for all finished work of Jesus Christ for the past 2,000 years, so also did believers look ahead in faith to what Jesus Christ would accomplish in the fullness of the times (Heb 11:1–40). Insofar a sinner trusts

Second, depending on the era of one's lifespan, covenant also functions as a means of situating humanity along God's redemptive-historical timeline.[107] When considered holistically, there is never an occasion that God does not relate to humanity under a specific covenant.[108] As such, Scripture reveals that every human being to ever live can effectively tie themselves to a specific covenant, and to all the special revelation God had dispensed up to that moment in time.[109] One cannot arrive at a correct interpretation—or application—of God's special revelation without recognizing its inextricable relationship to the redemptive-historical covenants.[110]

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in God's promise of redemption through his Son—at any period in human history—they receive God's free gift of salvation (Hab 2:4; Rom 1:16–17).

[107] The divine-human covenants made throughout the Bible were either established for a temporary period of time (at least in part) or are perpetually binding on the people of God until the Last Day. Therefore, it is the task of the biblical interpreter to ascertain which covenant(s) on God's redemptive-historical timeline are relevant to the age in which they live. Additional commentary on this matter is provided later in chap. 2.

[108] Whether speaking about creation, consummation, or anything in between those bookends of cosmic history, Robertson concurs with the affirmation that every person to ever live is bound to the covenant—and available special revelation—that corresponds with their lifetime:

> By creation God bound himself to man in covenantal relationship. After man's fall into sin, the God of all creation graciously bound himself to man again by committing himself to redeem a people to himself from lost humanity. From creation to consummation the covenantal bond has determined the relation of God to his people. The extent of the divine covenants reaches from the beginning of the world to the end of the age. (Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 25)

[109] Based on the observable data, Thomas R. Schreiner believes that the Bible plainly depicts divine-human relationships via covenant: "God's covenant is integrally related to his rule over his people, for God's covenant with his people aways involves a relationship. Furthermore, one of the refrains of Scripture is covenantal, where God pledges, 'I will be your God and you will be my people,' showing that God's covenant and rule are personal.'" Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King and His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 8–9. Therefore, since man's relationship to God is covenantal in nature—and necessarily includes the provision of special revelation in conjunction with God's covenantal relationship to man—all people can associate their available special revelation to the covenant-epoch they belong to (and vice versa).

[110] Matthew Barrett suggests that there are "four horizons" for interpreting Scripture: "(1) Textual Horizon: The reader pays close attention to the 'immediate context' within which any biblical text or book of the Bible is situated"; "(2) Epochal Horizon: 'The context of the period of revelation in which the book (or passage) falls.' Individual verses, chapters, and books are not static but land within a 'progressively revealed' history"; "(3) Canonical Horizon: 'The context of the entirety of revelation.' In this third horizon typology plays a critical role as types and shadows find their fulfillment in the person and work of the Son, the Christological archetype"; "(4) Theological Horizon: The rule of faith . . . [informs] our textual, epochal, and canonical horizons so that we do not interpret any passage or book in a way that

For the purpose of accentuating the preceding functions, this chapter will conclude with a succinct evaluation of every postlapsarian covenant made between God and man. In keeping with one of the central components of this thesis, all subsequent commentary will demonstrate how Scripture's depiction of the biblical covenants is harmonious with a Particular Baptist conception of covenant theology, as enveloped in the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689).

Examining the Noahic Covenant

The first explicit appearance of בְּרִית (*berith*) in the Old Testament occurs at the outset of the narrative recounting the Noahic Covenant (Gen. 6:18).[111] Given the gap in time that transpires between the first usage of בְּרִית (*berith*) and the remaining references found in the Noahic story (Gen 9:9, 11–13, 15–16),[112] there has been debate amongst biblical scholars as to whether there is one or two covenants made between God and Noah.[113] Despite interpretative ambiguity surrounding the *number* of covenants contained in Genesis 6:9–9:17, there is abundant clarity regarding the *substance* of God's covenant

would either violate the character of God or the meaning of his redemptive acts as he has revealed them to us." Matthew Barrett, "Will the Son Rise on a Fourth Horizon? The Heresy of Contemporaneity within Evangelical Biblicism and the Return of the Hermeneutical Boomerang for Dogmatic Exegesis," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 23, no. 2 (2019): 96. Given each of these so-called "horizons," the act of determining the relationship between covenant and special revelation would fall into Barrett's second hermeneutical category: the "Epochal Horizon."

[111] Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenant: A Concise Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 57.

[112] The parenthetical citations from Genesis represent every explicit usage of בְּרִית (*berith*) in the Noahic account. For confirmation, see Wigram, *The Englishman's Hebrew Concordance*, 272.

[113] For a sampling of notable works that portray different covenants being described in Gen 6 and 9, see Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003); Meredith Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview*; VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order*.

with Noah. At minimum, there are seven observable facets of the Noahic Covenant in the Genesis narrative:[114]

1. God promises to uphold the world with uniformity (Gen 8:21–22).
2. As a reiteration of the cultural mandate (Gen 1:28), God commissions Noah and his sons to fill the earth with offspring (Gen 9:1, 7).
3. God establishes fear between the animals of the Earth, and humanity (Gen 9:2).
4. In addition to the consumption of plants, God permits man to eat animals so long as blood is not in the animal meat itself (Gen 9:3–4).
5. God emphasizes the dignity of human life, thereby expressly forbidding murder and implementing capital punishment for those who commit murder (Gen 9:5–6).
6. In supplementation to God's act of covenanting with Noah, the Most High also applies this covenant to every creature that will live on the earth; whether human or non-human, every creature in the world will reap the benefits of God's covenant with Noah (Gen 9:8–10).
7. God promises to never destroy the earth by flood and employs the rainbow as the outward sign of this promise (Gen 9:11–17).

Each of these seven distinctives proper to the Noahic Covenant exemplifies special revelation from God to man, resulting in the proliferation of God's common grace to every creature residing on the Earth.[115] Although it is not salvific or eternal in nature, the Noahic Covenant is inherently gracious because it enables sinful men to enjoy lives of blessing in God's world until the Last Day (Matt 5:44; Acts 14:16–17), thereby leading to salvific and eternal blessings inasmuch as the Noahic Covenant preserves the human race

[114] While not exhaustive of the Noahic Covenant, each of the seven observable facets summarized above are, at minimum, consistent with the conclusions drawn about the Noahic Covenant in Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 218; Block, *Covenant*, 38–39; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 199–204; MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 871–72; Nichols, *Covenant Theology*, 147–51; VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order*, 124–26; Miles V. Van Pelt, "The Noahic Covenant of the Covenant of Grace," in Waters, Reid, and Muether, *Covenant Theology*, 125–27.

[115] In the Glossary of Terms section of *Exploring Christian Theology*, "common grace" is defined as "manifestations of God's grace that are given generally or 'commonly' to all people, regardless of their spiritual condition before Him. Blessings of common grace include life, health, sun, rain, and other good things experienced by both the righteous and the wicked." Nathan D. Holsteen and Michael J. Svigel, eds., *Creation, Fall, and Salvation*, vol. 2 of *Exploring Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Baker, 2015), 250. In the final analysis, the Noahic Covenant is architectonic to facilitating God's common grace in a fallen world.

so God's elect can come to faith throughout history.[116] By virtue of the Noahic Covenant, man has an objective basis for trusting in the uniformity of nature and can thereby acquire a deeper understanding of the *cosmos*.[117] Moreover, the Noahic Covenant should cause man to be passionate about promoting the value and flourishing of human life by recalling God's utter disdain for murder (Prov 6:17; Matt 5:21–22). Finally, the Noahic Covenant should alleviate any fears that the world might deteriorate into an unpredictable—or uninhabitable—realm prior to the Last Day (Joel 2:30–32; 2 Pet 3:3–9). Therefore, since God will continue to sustain the Earth exactly as he desires until the second coming of

[116] Nehemiah Coxe teases out the gracious dimensions of the Noahic Covenant, and how the Noahic Covenant lays the groundwork for the redemption of God's elect throughout the ages:

> The particular benefits and blessings given to mankind by [the Noahic Covenant] were, (1) fruitfulness for replenishing the earth; (2) dominion over the creatures, and the free use of them for food; (3) assurance that the judgment they had now escaped, would not be repeated—notwithstanding that later generations were likely to prove as wicked as those that had gone before them, for the same root and spring of corruption remained in them (Gen. 8:21). . . . We have to further note, (1) that the dispensation of goodness and forbearance which the world was set under by the *first promise,* was now ratified by a solemn *covenant.* In that covenant was also ensured the successive generation of mankind for the production of the promised Seed, *considered* both *personally* and *collectively*. And this assurance raised the faith of the Church one degree higher than it had attained before. This covenant also had its mystical use to the faithful, as shadowing the Covenant of Grace by Christ, and the ratification of this in the blood of His sacrifice. By this we are saved from the curse, and restored to a sanctified right in creature-comforts, and the hope of eternal life. And the sovereignty of God's goodness, with the *absoluteness* of his promise in this covenant, are instituted as a singular encouragement to the faith of the Church in reference to the promise of that grace that reigns in the New Covenant. (Nehemiah Coxe, *A Discourse of the Covenants That God Made with Men before the Law* [London: J. D., 1681], 58–59)

[117] Jason Lisle, an astrophysicist and creation scientist, explains how the uniformity of nature—as grounded in the Noahic Covenant (Gen 8:21–22)—enables the possibility for man to acquire true knowledge in the natural sciences:

> God is beyond time (2 Pet. 3:8) and has chosen to uphold the universe in a consistent fashion throughout time for our benefit. So even though conditions in the past may be quite different than those in the present and future, the way God upholds the universe (what we would call the 'laws of nature') will not arbitrarily change. God has told us that there are certain things we can count on to be true in the future—the seasons, the diurnal cycle, and so on (Gen. 8:22; Jer. 33:20–21). Therefore, under a given set of circumstances, the consistent Christian has the right to expect a given outcome [in scientific inquiry] because he or she relies upon the Lord to uphold the universe in a consistent way. (Jason Lisle, *The Ultimate Proof of Creation: Resolving the Origins Debate* [Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2009], 63)

Jesus Christ, the Noahic Covenant will remain universally applicable to postdiluvian humanity.[118]

Examining the Abrahamic Covenant

The heart of the book of Genesis—and the summit of man's primeval history—is ingrained in the Abrahamic Covenant.[119] Apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, Abraham is one of the most significant figures in redemptive-history.[120] Abraham is the natural father of God's Old Covenant people (Rom 4:1), and he is the spiritual father of God's elect from every tongue, tribe, and nation (Rom 4:11–18).[121] Whether viewed through the lens of Scripture or through the lens of world history, Abraham is a figure that merits the highest degree of scrutiny.

Few aspects are as definitional to the person and significance of Abraham than his covenantal relationship with the living God (Gen 12:1–7; 15:1–21; 17:1–14; 22:16–

[118] Andrew T. Walker connects the universal applicability of the Noahic Covenant to postdiluvian humanity:

> The Noahic Covenant provides the stage, as it were, on which the story of redemption unfolds. The world is a platform for the covenantal drama to unfold and for society to continue. Without the Noahic covenant, Christ would have no world to come into, which means that an incarnational anticipation is built into the preservative-function of the Noahic covenant. . . . [The Noahic Covenant applies] equally and universally to all persons of the world irrespective of their religious commitments. . . . More important, the Noahic Covenant still operates and will continue on until future judgment—or "while the earth remains" (8:22). This means that all of earth's inhabitants share in the blessings of common grace established by the Noahic Covenant." (Andrew T. Walker, *Liberty for All: Defending Everyone's Religious Freedom in a Pluralistic Age* [Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2021], 52–53)

[119] T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 48.

[120] Bruce K. Waltke expounds Abraham's pivotal role in the book of Genesis with lofty superlatives: "Both humanity's fall and God's plan for its redemption begin with a single individual. With Adam, one man's unfaithfulness and disobedience bring a curse upon the earth along with pain and death upon humanity. With Abraham, one man's faith and obedience bring the potential for a land of unique blessing and life to all." Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 306–7.

[121] Michael Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 50.

18).[122] The context of the Genesis narrative situates the life and calling of Abraham as the emergence of a "new beginning" in the redemptive prerogatives of Yahweh.[123] When viewed against the backdrop of sin's origination with Adam (Gen 3:14–19), the advent of murder through the life of Cain (Gen 4:1–15), or the universal judgment of humanity in the Noahic Flood (Gen 7:1–8:22) and Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1–9), the calling of Abraham charts the beginning of an irrevocable course in God's economy to redeem a people from every corner of the earth (Gen 12:1–3; 15:1–6, 17–21; 17:1–8; 22:17–18).[124]

In the Abrahamic Covenant, God makes three key promises to Abraham: (1) his family will be as numerous as the stars of the sky and the sand on the seashore (Gen 15:5; 22:17); (2) his descendants will inherit a promised land in Canaan (Gen 12:1, 5; 15:7, 18–21; 17:8); and (3) his descendants will bring about universal blessing to all peoples of the world (Gen 12:2–3; 17:6–8; 22:17–18). When viewing each of these promises in

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[122] As a collective story within the broader Genesis narrative, chaps. 12, 15, 17, and 22 must be recognized as indispensable parts to the Abrahamic Covenant. Renihan discusses the intricacies of how these chapters mesh:

> It is important to notice how Genesis 12, 15, and 17 build on each other. Some have strongly contrasted Genesis 15 and Genesis 17 because Genesis 15 seems to be unilateral and guaranteed while Genesis 17 seems to be bilateral and conditional. But all of these elements of the Abrahamic Covenant go together. God promised Abraham that He would multiply his descendants into nations with kings that would dwell in Canaan after a time of slavery, and that from these numerous descendants an offspring would be born who would mediate blessing to the world. As for Abraham and his descendants, they must keep God's commands, particularly circumcision, or else they forfeit participation in the promised blessings. (Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 91)

[123] Graeme Goldsworthy opines on how the calling of Abraham functions in the story of Genesis:

> The covenant to Abraham is remarkable for its specificity. A direct genealogical line is drawn between Noah and his son Shem, and Terah the father of Abraham. Thus there is a direct line of continuity from the theology of the covenant with Noah and the patriarchal covenant [with Abraham]. . . . It is reasonable to suggest that Genesis 3–11 demonstrates the necessity for the kind of saving activity that is given its initial expression with God's covenant with Abraham. The salvation experience of Noah appears to provide a fresh beginning, and it is an important foretaste of what is to come. But apart from the direct line to Abraham it peters out since things are really no better after the flood than before it and there is no revealed programme for further redemption until Abraham. The fact of salvation is illustrated with Noah but not its pattern. It is surely with Abraham that the new beginning is presented (Deut. 26:5–9). (Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012], 117)

[124] N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, vol. 1 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 262.

conjunction with Galatians 4:21–31, the two-tiered nature of the Abrahamic Covenant becomes evident; it is a divine-human relationship with distinctly physical and spiritual connotations, all of which clarify how this covenant should be understood redemptive historically.[125]

The history of the Old Testament bears witness to God fulfilling all the physical connotations promised via the Abrahamic Covenant *prior* to the advent of Christ.[126] The land dimension of the Abrahamic Covenant was fulfilled to the physical descendants of Abraham when Israel divided the land of Canaan among the tribes as their inheritance (Josh 21:43–45).[127] At the height of King Solomon's reign over Israel, the physical descendants of Abraham are likened to being as numerous as the sand on the seashore (1 Kgs 4:20–29).[128] Throughout their tenure in the wilderness and upon entering the Promised Land, the physical descendants of Israel were an instrument of temporal and spiritual blessing to the pagan nations surrounding them (Deut 31:9–13).[129] As such, God

[125] Pascal Denault helpfully describes the two-tiered nature of the Abrahamic Covenant: "Abraham possesses a physical posterity as well as a spiritual posterity (Rom. 9:6–8; Gal. 4:22–31); there is an external circumcision of the flesh and an internal circumcision of the heart (Rom. 2:28–29); there is a promised land here on earth and a heavenly kingdom." Pascal Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology: A Comparison Between Seventeenth-Century Particular Baptist and Paedobaptist Federalism*, trans. Mac Wigfield and Elizabeth Wigfield (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian, 2013), 117.

[126] Jason S. DeRouchie reports the physical tenets of the Abrahamic Covenant as being "realized in the temporary Mosaic covenant, wherein Israel became a nation enjoying the land." Jason S. DeRouchie, *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 31.

[127] Robert McKenzie, *Identifying the Seed: An Examination and Evaluation of the Differences between Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology* (Colorado Springs: CreateSpace, 2018), 54.

[128] Interestingly, Gary Schnittjer equates the Solomonic reign in Israel with widespread rest being enjoyed throughout the nation. Gary Schnittjer, *Old Testament Use of Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Guide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 194. The rest that Israel experienced under the reign of King Solomon was a corollary of the prosperity the nation had attained during the climax of its constitution.

[129] Samuel J. Schultz concludes that the "expansion of [Israel's] moral laws and additional regulations for holy living were designed to guide the Israelites in their conduct as God's holy people (Ex. 20–24; Lev. 11–26). Simple obedience to these moral, civil, and ceremonial laws would distinguish them from the surrounding nations." Samuel J. Schultz, *The Old Testament Speaks* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 59–60. Israel's witness to the surrounding nations would be a powerful means utilized by God to

was perfectly faithful in bringing the physical dimensions of the Abrahamic Covenant to fruition. Nevertheless, the physical promises associated with the Abrahamic Covenant were not an end in themselves; they were typological of greater spiritual realities in Christ (2 Cor 1:20; Gal 3:16–18).[130]

The New Testament affirms how God has continued to bring the spiritual dimensions of the Abrahamic Covenant to pass for several millennia. Whether Jew or Gentile, the spiritual descendants of Abraham from every age—through their common union with Jesus Christ—are inheritors of an eternal, heavenly land (Heb 11:10–16).[131] The members of this eternal and heavenly land are so vast that no man can count them, and the residents of that spiritual abode are comprised from every tribe, tongue, and nation (Rev 7:9–10).[132] As the spiritual offspring of Abraham, all Christians reside in this

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save elect Gentiles during the Old Covenant era of redemptive history (1 Kgs 8:41–43; Isa 56:6–8), and bear witness to his common grace shed abroad to all mankind (Gen 6:1–3; Ps 145:9).

[130] Samuel D. Renihan cites Benjamin Keach as a Particular Baptist proponent for the interpretation offered above:

> [Keach] argued that the Scriptures themselves interpreted God's dealings with Abraham in such a way that two seeds, one earthly and the other heavenly, received distinct promises, earthly and heavenly. Keach argued that the Abrahamic covenant offered earthly blessings, and since the new covenant was established on "better promises," Keach concluded that "He must be blind that can't discern from hence, that these were Two Covenants made with *Abraham.*" (Samuel D. Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance: The Federal Theology of the English Particular Baptists (1642–1704)* [Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2018], 308)

[131] O. Palmer Robertson catalogues how the earthly land enjoyed by the descendants of Abraham under the Old Covenant was ultimately intended to be typological of the heavenly land to be enjoyed by every spiritual descendent of Abraham throughout history:

> The possession of the [earthly] land under the old covenant was not an end in itself, but fit instead among the shadows, types, and prophecies that were characteristic of the old covenant in its presentation of redemptive truth. Just as the tabernacle was never intended to be a settled item in the plan of redemption but was to point to Christ's tabernacling among his people (cf. John 1:14), and just as the sacrificial system could never atone for sins but could only foreshadow the offering of the Son of God (Heb. 9:23–26), so in a similar manner Abraham received the promise of the land but never experienced the blessing of its full possession. In this way, the patriarch learned to look forward to "the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb. 11:10). O. Palmer Robertson, *The Israel of God: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2000], 13)

[132] Schreiner sets forth beautiful commentary on how God's diverse kingdom of saints will worship him in Heaven: "The redeemed from every cultural and ethnic background [will] stand before God and praise Him. They do not merely stand, however, in God's presence; they stand 'before the throne and

world as sojourners and strangers (1 Pet 2:9–11), commissioned to bear witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ until entering eschatological rest with all the redeemed in the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 4:1–10; 12:22–24).[133] Indeed, to these enterprises will the spiritual offspring of Abraham labor until Christ returns in glory, or calls them home through physical death.

Examining the Mosaic Covenant

Broadly speaking, the entirety of evangelicalism can be positioned on a spectrum featuring six discrete theological systems: Classic Dispensationalism, Revised Dispensationalism, Progressive Dispensationalism, Progressive Covenantalism, Covenant Theology, and Christian Reconstructionism.[134] Yet upon sifting through the acute underpinnings of these doctrinal conglomerations, perhaps the most salient dividing line is the Mosaic Covenant.[135] Namely, to what extent can New Covenant believers apply the Mosaic Covenant to their lives?[136] The answer given in response to the foregoing question will not only ensue seismic ramifications on one's comprehension of Scripture, but will

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before the Lamb' (Rev. 7:9). . . . Indeed, they praise God for the salvation they have received." Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 422.

[133] Sinclair B. Ferguson quotes from John Owen's personal reflections on how the spiritual descendants of Abraham become co-heirs of God's heavenly kingdom: "[Believers] are the children and seed of Abraham, which we are not but by our union with Christ, the one seed, to whom the promises of [the covenant of grace] were originally made." Sinclair B. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1995), 32. Stated differently, all who are justified by faith alone share the faith of Abraham, the Savior of Abraham, and the eternal destination of Abraham.

[134] Benjamin L. Merkle identifies—and defines—each of these six major theological systems undergirding contemporary evangelicalism. The reader is encouraged to consult this volume for further clarity on how Merkle perceives these doctrinal frameworks. Benjamin L. Merkle, *Discontinuity to Continuity: A Survey of Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020), 203–11.

[135] John S. Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and the New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1987), 64.

[136] G. K. Beale and Benjamin L. Gladd tease out pertinent questions pertaining to the Mosaic Covenant's continuity/discontinuity for subsequent generations of redemptive history in *The Story Retold: A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020), 380–81.

also impact how the Christian faith is expressed on a regular basis.[137] Therefore, generating biblical-theological clarity around the Mosaic Covenant is of supreme importance.

As a continuation of the Abrahamic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant further develops the relationship God made with Abraham insofar that it contains promises God will fulfill to his people on a corporate level (Exod 19:3–8; 24:3–8, 27–28).[138] However, the fulfillment and enjoyment of these covenant promises are conditioned upon Israel's faithfulness to adhere to the terms of the covenant (Deut 6:20, 24–25; 11:26–28).[139] The formal establishment of the Mosaic Covenant is described in Exodus 19:1–24:18, but is also further elaborated throughout various parts of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.[140] At its core, the Mosaic Covenant was special revelation bestowed from God to Moses for the purpose of governing the life and conduct of Israel in the Promised

[137] Since theological convictions comprise a multifaceted unit, interpretations drawn from God's Word will cultivate far-reaching effects on both theoretical and practical dimensions of Christian religious expression. Jeannine K. Brown acknowledges the constitutive repercussions of biblical interpretation: "[Biblical] texts are mutually interdependent. 'Each and every text forms part of a network of texts from which it derives its meaning.'" Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication: Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 225–56. Put in a different way, other dimensions of one's theology will be directly influenced—for better or for worse—based on the conclusions drawn from individual passages of Scripture. Thus, in the case of the Mosaic Covenant, the position embraced regarding its perpetual or transitory relevance will overlap with other doctrinal views.

[138] J. V. Fesko observes, "What applies to the inauguration of the Mosaic covenant also applies to the Abrahamic covenant; the former is founded upon the latter (Ex. 2:24)." J.V. Fesko, *Last Things First: Unlocking Genesis 1–3 with the Christ of Eschatology* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2007), 160.

[139] Griffiths peruses the conditional nature of the Mosaic Covenant: "The [Mosaic] covenant presented Israel with a promise suspended upon a condition. God promised to be faithful to all who kept his commandments (Ex. 19:6; Deut. 7:9; 28:1). He was putting before the people an offer of life and death. The promises made to Israel could be realized if only it would remain faithful to the Lord." Griffiths, *Covenant Theology*, 92.

[140] For comments on the Mosaic Covenant's expansive development throughout several portions of the Pentateuch see VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order*, 287–326.

Land.[141] As such, the Mosaic Covenant contained commandments for personal conduct, structured Israel's worship of God, and instructed Israel in domestic and foreign affairs.[142]

At *minimum*, there are six organizing elements of the Mosaic Covenant.[143] First, the Mosaic Covenant was formally inaugurated at Mount Sinai and remained in effect until the New Covenant was established with the death of Jesus Christ (Luke 22:20; Heb 8:7–13; 9:11–26). Second, the Mosaic Covenant was only applicable to the nation of Israel (Deut 4:1–6:25).[144] Third, a three-fold division of the law is contained within the Mosaic Covenant: moral (e.g., Exod 20:1–17), civil (e.g., Deut 13:6–11), and ceremonial (e.g., Lev 11:13–47).[145] Fourth, the tripartite law affixed to the Mosaic

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[141] Matthew Barrett explains the connection between the Mosaic Covenant's *substance* as special revelation—and the Mosaic Covenant's *purpose* as special revelation:

> God's Word [in the Mosaic Covenant] was not restricted to the educated adult but could be understood and absorbed by little boys and girls. For this reason, the Lord could instruct Moses in Deuteronomy 31 to assemble the people—men, women, and little ones, as well as foreigners—to listen as his law was read before all of Israel so "they can listen and learn to fear the LORD your God, and follow carefully all the words of this law" (31:12). No one in Israel was excluded from listening and embracing God's Word. (Matthew Barrett, *God's Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016], 308)

[142] The perspective delineated in the sentence correlating to this footnote is a reference to the three-fold division of the Mosaic Law. As categorically evidenced by Philip S. Ross, the three-fold division of the Mosaic Law is a doctrine that has been recognized by Christians for two millennia. Ross provides the following definition of the three-fold division of the Mosaic Law: "[The ceremonial division] regulated the Israelite sacrificial system and matters such as ceremonial cleanliness. . . . [The civil division concerned] everyday civil matters in the Israelite community. . . . [The moral division] revealed the demands of God upon all people, not just those in ancient Israel." Philip S. Ross, *From the Finger of God: The Biblical and Theological Basis for the Threefold Division of the Law* (Glasgow, Scotland: Mentor, 2010), 2.

[143] These six "organizing elements of the Mosaic Covenant" share substantial agreement with the five observations made about the nature of the Mosaic Covenant in J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 360–63.

[144] For the sake of clarification, under the Old Covenant, Gentiles who identified with Israel were partakers of the blessings and curses associated with the covenant. Some examples of Gentiles dwelling with the nation of Israel under the Old Covenant are Jethro (Exod 18:1–27), Rahab (Josh 2:1–24), and Ruth (Ruth 1:16).

[145] John Tweeddale observes that the threefold division of the Mosaic law "had widespread agreement within reformed theology . . . [with an] origin [predating] the Reformation." John Tweeddale, *John Owen and Hebrews: The Foundation of Biblical Interpretation* (London: T & T Clark, 2019), 169. Nevertheless, despite its rich historical heritage, several renowned scholars reject the threefold division of the Mosaic law. For a survey of such views, see D. A. Carson, "The Tripartite Division of the Law: A

Covenant was not given as a way of salvation, but as a guide for how Israel was to function as a theocracy (Lev 17:11; Gal 3:21–25).[146] Fifth, the Mosaic Covenant was the channel through which the physical promises of the Abrahamic Covenant were fulfilled to the people of Israel (Exod 19:3–8; 24:3–8; 34:27–28; Deut 30:15–20; Jer 11:2–5).[147] Sixth, the Mosaic Covenant contained predictive prophecy to prepare Israel for what the Messiah would accomplish during his time on the earth (Deut 18:15–18; Acts 3:22).[148]

Summarily, while the Mosaic Covenant is no longer binding on the people of God—nor has it been since the New Covenant was established in Christ's blood (Jer

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review of Philip Ross, *From the Finger of God*," in *From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis; Essays in Honor of G. K. Beale*, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and Benjamin J. Gladd (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 226–28; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 785–88; and Brian S. Rosner, *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013), 26–44.

[146] John H. Sailhamer summarizes the ultimate function of the Mosaic Law:

> [The Pentateuch's view of the Mosaic Law] . . . is, in fact, remarkably similar to that of Jeremiah 31:31ff. Just as Jeremiah looked back at the failure of the Sinai covenant and the Mosaic Law which the Israelites had failed to keep, so the author of the Pentateuch already had little hope for blessing *sub lege*. Jeremiah looked forward to a time when the Torah would be internalized, not written on tablets of stone (cf. Ezek. 36:26), but written on the heart (Jer. 31:31). In the same way the Pentateuch holds up the example of Abraham, a model of faith, one who did not have the tablets of stone but who nevertheless kept the law by living a life of faith. At the same time it offers the warning of the life of Moses, who died in the wilderness because of his lack of faith. In this respect it seems fair to conclude that the view of the Mosaic Law found in the Pentateuch is essentially that of the New Covenant passages in the prophets. (John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 270–71.

[147] While the Mosaic Covenant functions as the channel through which the Abrahamic Covenant's physical promises to the nation of Israel were fulfilled, there were likewise spiritual blessings mediated to the elect who are under this covenant (Lev 26:3–13; Deut 7:12–16; 28:1–14). Most notably, salvation was imparted to all who looked ahead in faith to the coming of the promised Messianic Redeemer (John 8:56; Rom 4:1–2; Heb 11:1–40).

[148] Consider the following commentary from the *Reformation Study Bible* on the role Messianic predictive prophecy played under the Old Covenant:

> [Deuteronomy 18:18 states] God will communicate His word to Israel through a succession of prophets. As mediators of God's words to the people, the other Old Testament prophets will function in ways similar to Moses (v. 16). But none will be the initial mediators of a covenant, and none will equal Moses's intimacy with God or receive divine revelations in the same manner that he does (Num. 12:6–8; Deut. 34:10). This passage, then, finds final fulfillment in the prophet who is equal to, indeed greater than, the prophet Moses—Jesus Christ (Acts 3:22–26; 7:37; cf. John 5:45–47; Heb. 3:2–6). Like Moses, Christ is the mediator of a covenant between God and His people (Luke 22:20; Heb. 8:7–13). Unlike Moses, Christ not only speaks of Gods words—He is the Word of God (John 1:1–18). (R. C. Sproul, ed., *The Reformation Study Bible* [Sanford, FL: Ligonier, 2019], 279–80)

31:31–34; 2 Cor 3:1–18; Heb 8:6–13)—the Mosaic Covenant remains perpetually relevant to God's people.[149] Scripture's record of the Mosaic Covenant continues to be a powerful testimony to the character and works of God throughout the nation of Israel's history—and given its place in God-breathed Scripture, New Covenant believers have a responsibility to commit themselves to better understanding the contours of the Mosaic Covenant (Rom 15:4; 2 Tim 2:15; 3:16–17): perhaps none more important than how it points to and finds fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 24:27).[150]

Examining the Davidic Covenant

From the inception of human existence to the conclusion of Old Testament history, kingship has been interconnected with God's purposes for his image bearers.[151] Indeed, kingship is central to Adam and Eve's reign as divine vice-regents over the Earth

[149] In keeping with historical Particular Baptist Federalism, this thesis operates from the position that the entirety of the Mosaic Covenant passed away with the redemptive-historical inauguration of the New Covenant (Heb 8:6–13). However, the moral division of the Mosaic Law is perpetual and universal in its application to humanity *by virtue* of its roots within the conscience of every image bearer to ever live (Rom 2:14–16). The moral division of the Mosaic Law—as encapsulated in the Ten Commandments—put into writing what was already written on the conscience of every person prior to their promulgation at Mount Sinai (Gen 4:3–4; Exod 12:15–20; 16:22–30). Moreover, in every generation following the Mosaic Covenant epoch, the substance of the Ten Commandments has been universally transcribed into the fabric of humanity (Rom 1:18–23). As the moral dimension of the Mosaic Law, the Ten Commandments function as a reflection of God's character, directing humanity in how they are to be holy as their Creator is holy (Exod 32:15–16; Lev 11:44–47; 1 Pet 1:15–16). On the Last Day, every unbeliever will be judged against this unchanging standard of divine righteousness, and every believer will be justified on the basis of Christ's perfect conformity to its demands in their place (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 9:27–28). This vital caveat must be kept in mind when the thesis states that "the Mosaic Covenant is no longer binding on the people of God, nor has it been since the New Covenant was established in Christ's blood." For a Particular Baptist defense of this position, see Samuel E. Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*, 5th ed. (Welwyn Garden City, UK: EP, 2016), 279–86. Conversely, for an argument against the aforementioned understanding of the Mosaic Covenant, see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 696–97.

[150] For a wonderful book-length treatment on seeing Christ in all of Scripture—including the Mosaic Covenant—see Peter A. Lillback, ed, *Seeing Christ in All of Scripture: Hermeneutics at Westminster Theological Seminary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Seminary, 2016).

[151] Richard P. Belcher Jr. surveys the redemptive-historical motif of kingship throughout the major Old Testament covenants. In doing so, he contends that dominion over creation—whether in the home, over the created order, or within the context of civil affairs—is foundational to how God has fashioned reality. Richard P. Belcher Jr., *The Fulfillment of the Promises of God: An Explanation of Covenant Theology* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2020), 108–12.

(Gen 1:26–28), to the Abrahamic Covenant's promise for kings to rule over Israel (Gen 17:6–8; 49:10–11), and to ensuring that the Old Covenant Law will be consistently applied to governing God's people in the Promised Land (Deut 17:14–20).[152] The biblical motif of kingship is also present in the enactment of the Davidic Covenant, as seen through God's provision of[153]: (1) a promise of salvation through the seed of Eve (Gen 3:15); (2) land, offspring, and blessing through the lineage of Abraham (Gen 12:1–3); and (3) a law to govern moral, civil, and ceremonial affairs within theocratic Israel (Exod 19:1–24:18). In accordance with the progressive unfolding of God's eternal plan through the biblical covenants, the next provision for his people was a kingdom (Judg 21:25; 1 Sam 8:7–9, 19–22).

As providentially orchestrated by the Most High, the first king (Saul) appointed to lead theocratic Israel was a dismal failure (1 Sam 15:1–35); God wanted to show his people that true kingship was not merely a matter of externals, but was ultimately about the heart (1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:21–22).[154] Thus, shortly after Saul's death, David—a man after God's own heart—was formally inaugurated as king over Israel (2 Sam 5:1–16), and would go on to lead the nation to a season of widespread

[152] Each of the observations about kingship included in this sentence are congruent with the biblical-theological insights provided in Brandon D. Crowe, *The Path of Faith: A Biblical Theology of Covenant and Law* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2021), 60, 65.

[153] Each of the divine provisions made prior to the enactment of the Davidic Covenant is fleshed out by Renihan: "The kingdom of Israel was established and ruled by covenants. The land was promised to Abraham's people in the Abrahamic Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant instituted the full complex of laws that God used to rule the people in that land. In the Davidic Covenant, the kingdom reaches consummation. As it was for the Mosaic covenant, so also in this case awareness of the context of the covenant is vital." Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 123.

[154] Eugene H. Merrill unapologetically ascribes the failure of Saul's reign over theocratic Israel to the sovereign prerogatives of God: "Saul, though chosen to be king of Israel, was never designated as 'son of God' nor granted priestly privileges by virtue of that relationship. Here, then, is where his disobedience and rejection lay—he arrogantly and consciously stepped beyond the bounds and entered an arena of kingship that was theologically as well as historically reserved for David and his dynasty alone." Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 211.

prosperity (2 Sam 7:1).[155] Against this redemptive-historical backdrop, David determined to express his gratitude for all that God had given to him, and to the nation of Israel (2 Sam 7:1–3).[156] From David's perspective, since God had blessed him with an extraordinary living situation, it was only fitting for him to build a glorious temple for God's immediate presence to reside.[157] However, God had other plans and took it upon himself to ratify a covenant with King David (2 Sam 7:1–17; 1 Chron 17:1–27; Pss 89:3–4, 19–37; 132:10–18).[158] In this covenant, God utilized the prophet Nathan to communicate that while David himself will not be the one to build a temple for the ark of God during Israel's time of rest (1 Chron 22:6–8), God covenants to David that one of his descendants would be tasked with the privilege of doing so (2 Sam 7:12–13).[159] Additionally, in supplementation to this divine promise, David receives at least five other pledges from the Lord:[160]

1. God promises that David's name would be made great (2 Sam 7:9).
2. God promises that a home would be provided for the nation of Israel (2 Sam 7:10–11).

[155] Eugene H. Merrill, *An Historical Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 205.

[156] Larry R. Helyer, *Yesterday, Today, and Forever: The Continuing Relevance of the Old Testament* (Salem, WI: Sheffield, 2004), 183.

[157] Matthew Henry reflects that the narrative in 2 Sam 7 led him to surmise that

> David considered (v. 2) the stateliness of his own habitation (*I dwell in a house of cedar*), and compared with that the meanness of the habitation of the ark (*the ark dwells within curtains*), and thought this incongruous, that he should dwell in a palace and the ark in a tent. David had been uneasy till he found out a *place for the ark* (Ps. cxxxii. 4, 5), and now he is uneasy till he finds out a better place. Gracious grateful souls cannot enjoy their own accommodations while they see the church of God in distress and under a cloud. David can take little pleasure in a house of cedar for himself, unless the ark have one. (Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary in One Volume: Genesis to Revelation* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961], 335)

[158] While these passages are not exhaustive of every Old Testament passage that references/alludes to the Davidic Covenant, these are some of the most explicit texts found therein.

[159] The motivation for why David aspired to build a temple for God in the first place is provided by Joyce G. Baldwin: "The temple, like the tabernacle, would provide the means of access to the great God who had condescended to name for himself this one spot on earth [in Israel]." Joyce G. Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 8 (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1988), 231.

[160] Graeme Goldsworthy predicates similar covenant pledges to David in *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 167–68.

3. God promises that Israel would be given undisturbed rest from all its enemies (2 Sam 7:10–11).

4. God promises that a son of David would take over David's kingdom, and that his kingdom will endure forever (2 Sam 7:12–13, 16).

5. God promises that he would be a father to David's forthcoming son, lovingly disciplining him as necessary to be a faithful king over Israel (2 Sam 7:14–15).

With the rise of Solomon to the throne of Israel (1 Kgs 2:12; 1 Chron 28:1–21), and the subsequent building of the temple (1 Kgs 6:1–8:66; 2 Chron 2:1–6:42), the Davidic Covenant receives partial fulfillment just one generation after its redemptive-historical establishment (1 Kgs 9:1–9; 2 Chron 7:11–22).[161] Yet, as seen throughout the New Testament, the consummation of the Davidic Covenant is directly applied to—and fulfilled by—the resurrected and ascended Christ: David's Lord and Greater Son (Ps 110:1–7; Matt 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42–43; Acts 2:34–36; Heb 1:13).[162] In other words, what was typologically revealed through the Davidic kingship has been consummately realized through the person and work of the King of kings and the Lord of lords (Ps 110:1–7; Acts 2:29–36).[163] All in all, what was formerly seen as only partially realized between the time

[161] Gregg R. Allison identifies Solomon as one of the four "referents . . . in view in [the Davidic Covenant]: king David himself; the immediate offspring of David, Solomon; the descendants of David, the Davidic kings of Israel; and an eternal Davidic king, Jesus Christ." Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 68. A few paragraphs later on the same page, Allison places special emphasis on Solomon's responsibility to fulfill temporal stipulations to the covenant made between God and David. As seen from his tenure as king of Israel, the conditional and temporal dimensions of the Davidic Covenant were only partially fulfilled by Solomon, necessitating One who would come and bring about flawless fulfillment of the covenant: the Lord Jesus Christ.

[162] Schreiner notes, "The promise of universal blessing made to Abraham will become a reality through a Davidic king, and in Acts that king is clearly Jesus Christ (Acts 3:24–26). The creation mandate to human beings, to rule the world for God, would become a reality through the covenant with Abraham, and the covenant of Abraham was fulfilled through a son of David, Jesus Christ." Thomas R. Schreiner, *Handbook on Acts and Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 7.

[163] The typological revelation—and Christological fulfillment—of the Davidic Covenant is captured by George Eldon Ladd, David Wenham, and R. T. France in *A Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Donald A. Hagner (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 1994):

> The idea of the messianic Son of God goes back to the promise to David with reference to his descendants who should succeed him on the throne of Israel, and it looks beyond the immediate descendants of David to that greater descendant who should be the messianic Son of God in the fullest sense of the word. Of David's son, God said, "I will be his father, and he shall be my son" (2 Sam. 7:14). This promise is enlarged in Psalm 89 where God said of David, "And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. . . . I will establish his line forever and his throne as the

of King Solomon and King Jesus has been fully validated by God's people for the past 2,000 years.[164]

Examining the New Covenant (The Covenant of Grace)

One of the most unique marks of Particular Baptist Covenant Theology is the New Covenant's identification as *the* Covenant of Grace.[165] With origins in the federal theology of the seventeenth century and beyond, this perception of the New Covenant is not a historical novelty.[166] In fact, there was a time in which a failure to equate the New Covenant with the Covenant of Grace was viewed as a biblical-theological inconsistency

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> days of the heavens" (vv. 27, 29). David's posterity is included in his person, and the high promise, never fully realized in any of his successors, points forward to the greater son of David who should become the Prince of the kings of the earth. The messianic significance of this phrase is most clearly seen in Psalm 2 where the coming ruler is called the anointed of the Lord, the king, and God's Son: "You are my son, today I have begotten you" (Ps. 2:7). The anointed King by virtue of his office is here called God's Son."

[164] In Christ, David's name has been made great. In Christ, all believers have an eternal home in his kingdom. Matt 2:15 cites Hos 11:1 in reference to the nation of Israel and directly applies it to the Lord Jesus Christ as being the true Israel of God. As such, all of Christ's people are members of the true Israel and possess an eternal home in his kingdom. In Christ, all believers will be given undisturbed rest from their enemies by virtue of dwelling with him in the kingdom of Heaven (Rev 21:1–8). In Christ, the dynasty of David endures forever because of Christ's legal right to the throne of David through the genealogy of Joseph (this is demonstrated in Matt 1:1–17). Whereas Solomon built the physical temple of God in the nation of Israel, Jesus Christ is David's greater Son and is a greater Solomon (Matt 12:42). As such, Jesus Christ has established his kingdom forever and is continuing to build the temple of God; he is sovereignly drawing his elect to himself to become spiritual partakers of his body: the eschatological temple of God (1 Cor 3:16–17; 6:19–20). Whereas God had to discipline Solomon at times due to his unfaithfulness (1 Kgs 11:1–40), God the Father never had to discipline his only begotten Son. Jesus Christ was perfectly obedient at every point in his earthly life, where he perfectly accomplished the redemption for all his people (Luke 2:52; Heb 4:15). In Christ, the throne of David has been established forever because the kingdom of Jesus Christ will have no end; indeed, it will endure for eternity future (Luke 1:33; Matt 28:18–20).

[165] Although Waldron *does not* personally believe the New Covenant ought to be seen as *the* Covenant of Grace (per his interpretation of chap. 7 in the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith), he does provide a lengthy footnote to corroborate the uniqueness of this core Particular Baptist persuasion. See Waldron, *A Modern Exposition*, 128n2.

[166] For a reputable book length treatment on the origins and progressive systemization of Baptistic federal theology, see Matthew C. Bingham, *Orthodox Radicals: Baptist Identity in the English Revolution* (New York: Oxford University, 2019).

amongst the majority of Baptists in the Western world.[167] Therefore, what follows is not only an attempt to accurately divide the Word of truth (2 Tim 2:15), but also an effort to promote awareness around how Baptists have assessed the New Covenant in previous centuries.

At the rudimentary level, the New Covenant is the promise that God will give his people a new heart, thereby enabling believers to love, worship, and obey him through the power of the Holy Spirit.[168] An abundance of biblical texts directly prophesy—or cite

[167] Renihan rightly recounts the prevailing view that many scholars have had about covenant theology through the twentieth century, and how that view is beginning to be modified in light of the testimony of church history:

> In most of the material that has been reprinted over the last half-century, Covenant Theology has been presented as if it necessarily implied the doctrine and practice of infant baptism. We could fill much space here simply listing the books that have taken this position. . . . The books written from a Padeobaptist perspective are often dismissive of the Credobaptist (i.e., believer's baptism) point of view, and those defending believer's baptism have often failed to give sufficient effort to presenting a full-blown covenantal system. The end result is that Padeobaptists have seldom, if ever, considered the possibility of a covenantal Credobaptist position, and many Baptists are simply ignorant of the centrality of the covenant and its usefulness in defending their own beliefs. This book is an attempt to rectify this deficiency. In the seventeenth century, covenantal defenses of believer's baptism were *the rule rather than the exception.* (James M. Renihan, "Why This Reprint [of Nehemiah Coxe's and John Owen's Federal Theology] Is Important?," in Miller, Renihan, and Orozco, *Covenant Theology*, 1–2, emphasis added)

[168] This definition is transcribed in Herman Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church and New Creation*, vol. 4 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 659. From a Particular Baptist perspective, the New Covenant (Covenant of Grace) is the realization of the divine solution whereby sinners can enjoy a right relationship with the triune God through Christ. In the covenant of grace, the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ (the second Adam) is credited to all who will ever be saved by virtue of his perfect life, substitutionary atoning death, bodily resurrection, and ascension into Heaven (Rom 4:23–25). Because Jesus Christ perfectly fulfilled the stipulations of the covenant of works (perfect obedience to God) during his life and bore the penalty of the elect's sin in his person on the cross, all those who belong to him are reconciled to God and come to enter into an eternal relationship with him as sons in the covenant of grace (John 1:12; Eph 2:8–9; 1 John 3:1–2). Where Adam failed as mankind's representative head in the covenant of works, Christ perfectly succeeded on behalf of H\his people so that they might enjoy the eternal blessings offered in the covenant of grace: the New Covenant in his blood (Luke 22:20). What is more, sinners who lived and died in faith prior to the redemptive-historical inauguration of the New Covenant still partook of the blessings of the New Covenant proleptically. The salvation of such believers came by virtue of them looking past the types and shadows of the Old Covenant to the gospel promise being progressively revealed throughout history (Heb 8:1–10:22). Thus, although the promise of the New Covenant was prevalent in redemptive history from the Garden of Eden onward (Gen 3:15), the New Covenant itself was not instituted until the penal substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus Christ at the cross (Luke 22:20). Therefore, Particular Baptists can affirm that every elect sinner throughout redemptive history was saved by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone (Christ being the fulfillment of the gospel promises made throughout the Old Covenant: 1 Cor 10:1–4; 2 Cor 1:20). The faith of Old Covenant believers—looking forward to the fulfillment of the gospel promise in the fullness of

concrete fulfillment—of the New Covenant, but arguably the clearest is found in Hebrews 8:6–13.[169] In that passage's citation of Jeremiah 31:31–34, and in the surrounding commentary, the New Covenant is pictured as qualitatively different than every preceding divine-human covenant enacted after the Fall.[170] Whereas the prior covenants mediated special revelation from God to man for the purpose of drawing the elect to saving faith at the appointed time, the New Covenant *itself* is credited with the redemption of sinful man: Only the New Covenant is exclusively comprised of believers who love and obey God from the heart (Heb 8:8–11), and it is the New Covenant alone that transmits forgiveness

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time (Gal 4:4–5)—was of the same substance as the faith of New Covenant believers who looked backward to the fulfillment of the gospel promise (Rom 4:9–25).

[169] In his treatment of the New Covenant, Michael Svigel cites eleven "key passages": Isa 42:6–7; Isa 59:20–21; Jer 32:37–40; Ezek 16:60–63; Ezek 37:21–28; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6; Heb 8:6–13; Heb 9:15; Heb 12:24. Michael J. Svigel, "Passages to Master," in *The Church, Spiritual Growth, and the End Times*, vol. 3 of *Exploring Christian Theology*, ed. Nathan D. Holsteen and Michael J. Svigel (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2015), 144. When embarking upon thorough studies of the New Covenant, these texts are great places to start. Moreover, Gentry and Wellum make note that the following passages also directly pertain to the New Covenant, yet are presented under the following headings in Scripture (these are not found in Svigel): (1) everlasting covenant: Isa 55:1–5; 61:8–9; Jer 50:2–5; (2) covenant of peace: Isa 54:1–10 (esp. 54:9–10); Ezek 34:36–41 (esp. 34:25); (3) promise of a new heart and a new spirit: Ezek 11:18–21; 18:30–32; 36:24–32 (esp. 36:26); and (4) new covenant: Jer 31:31–34. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 488.

[170] Despite being a Padeobaptist, Geerhardus Vos beautifully summarizes the irrevocable benefits that are entwined to the New Covenant (Particular Baptists can heartily agree with this quote insofar it pertains to the Covenant of Grace proper): "In the covenant of grace God also guarantees for man himself that everything . . . accomplished [in the promise of salvation] must happen." Geerhardus Vos, *Soteriology*, vol. 4 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. Richard B. Gaffin (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2012), 219. Although the Jer 31:31–34 passage is specifically in contrast to the Mosaic (Old) Covenant, the New Covenant (i.e., Covenant of Grace) can still be acknowledged as qualitatively different than every preceding divine-human covenant because it is the only covenant that *saves* elect sinners. While sinners have certainly been saved while residing under other postlapsarian covenants, salvation itself was bestowed exclusively through the retroactive application of the New Covenant to their account. Thomas Patient provides auxiliary perspective:

> [The Apostle Paul] confirms that gospel promise in Genesis 12:3 and 15:5 to be the new covenant, wherein was given, through faith, the justification of life, excluding in this point the covenant of circumcision (i.e., the Abrahamic Covenant). And both these covenants are made with Abraham in Genesis 17. There you find the new covenant made with him in the sixth verse, and from the seventh verse to the fourteenth, the covenant of circumcision in the flesh. The new covenant is expressed in the third verse. . . . This is, by the apostle Paul in Romans 4:17–18, held out to be the covenant of life, which he doth clearly hold distinct and different from the covenant of circumcision. (Thomas Patient, *Baptism and the Distinction of the Covenants* [Kansas City, MO: Baptist Heritage, 2022], 37)

of sins to God's people (Heb 8:12).[171] Therefore, the New Covenant effectively secures what every former, postlapsarian, divine-human covenant pointed forward to: the self-revelation of Jesus Christ culminating in his redemptive work on behalf of the elect (Eph 1:9–12).[172]

In conclusion, Particular Baptists recognize that the New Covenant was inaugurated through the death of Jesus Christ: the divinely appointed mediator of the New Covenant (Luke 22:20; Heb 9:15).[173] This New Covenant was prototypically revealed to Adam in the promise of salvation by the seed of the woman (Gen 3:15), and was progressively clarified by further steps (Rom 16:25–27; Eph 3:4–7; Titus 1:1–2; Heb 1:1–4).[174] Given Jesus Christ's flawless keeping of the Covenant of Works on behalf of God's elect, the New Covenant mediates the blessings of the Covenant of Redemption to every member of the New Covenant (past, present, and future): salvation from the penalty,

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[171] The exegesis rendered by Andreas J. Köstenberger illuminates the two primary ways in which the New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant:

> The two aspects highlighted here by the prophet Jeremiah (who prophesied during Israel's Babylonian exile in the sixth century BC), in which the new covenant will be superior to the old, are these: (1) God's law will be written on people's hearts, internally (a reference to the indwelling Holy Spirit), and (2) God will remember people's sins no more—that is, the forgiveness mediated through the new covenant is *definitive* and *complete.* (Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Handbook on Hebrews through Revelation* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020], 36, emphasis original)

[172] Drawing from the application of Jer 31:31–34 in Heb 8:6–13, Ladd, Wenham, and France put forth incisive comparisons and contrasts between the Old and New Covenants in *A Theology of the New Testament*, 628–30.

[173] Karen H. Jobes plainly articulates the redemptive-historical establishment of the New Covenant—against the backdrop of the other postlapsarian covenants: "The new covenant described in the New Testament had been established by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ." Karen H. Jobes, *Letters to the Church: A Survey of Hebrews and the General Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 4.

[174] Paraphrase of The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith in Modern English, "Chapter 7—God's Covenant," Founders Ministries, July 23, 2022, https://founders.org/library/1689-confession/chapter-7-gods-covenant/, para. 3.

power, and presence of sin.[175] Until the Lord returns to judge the living and the dead, this will be the final covenant experienced in redemptive history (Acts 2:14–36).[176]

Conclusion

This chapter solidified the biblical-theological centrality of covenant from three angles. A working *definition* of covenant was provided after perusing how the English term has been translated from the biblical languages, in addition to interacting with how God's people have perceived "covenant" throughout church history. In addition, the *necessity* of covenant was elucidated from the vantage points of God's *ad intra* life, and God's *ad extra* dealings within creation. The reason for covenant being a redemptive-historical

[175] Micah Renihan and Samuel Renihan tease out the connection between the Covenant of Grace, the Covenant of Works, the Covenant of Redemption, and how Believers derive benefits from those covenants through faith in Jesus Christ:

> Where do we see the accomplishment of the redemption of the elect in history through the incarnation and death of Christ? It is in the New Covenant, made in the blood of Christ. What is it that Christ claims that he has come to do? He claims that he has come to redeem those whom the Father has given to him. His purpose is to accomplish the *pactum salutis* in time and history. The New Covenant goes no further than the *pactum salutis*, not only because Christ specifically said that his mission was purely to redeem the elect, but also because the New Covenant is made in Christ's blood, redeeming blood whose salvific merit is determined by the *pactum salutis* and whose benefits have never been and never will be applied to any but the elect. This means that the parties of the New Covenant are none other than God and Christ, and the elect in Him. . . . There is one uniting and driving force in redemptive history, and that is the covenant of redemption. Although it is not accomplished in history until Christ comes, we see the gathering in of the elect who believe in Christ from the fall onward. Where we see that in-gathering of the elect who believe in the gospel as it is revealed progressively in types and shadows, there we see the retroactive New Covenant, and that is the covenant of grace. What has been required of all men at all times in all places is to believe the gospel however it has been revealed in a particular moment of redemptive history. (Micah Renihan and Samuel Renihan, "Reformed Baptist Covenant Theology and Biblical Theology," in Barcellos, *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage*, 476–78)

[176] By virtue of man's universal descent from Adam (Rom 5:12–21), and by virtue of the Noahic Covenant being directly tied to creation (Gen 9:9–17), every human being naturally resides under the Covenant of Works and the Noahic Covenant until the Last Day. However, the timing of one's lifespan—and the state of one's spirituality (when viewed through the lens of the spiritual dimension of the Abrahamic Covenant and the New Covenant itself)—will dictate which additional postlapsarian covenant(s) they reside under (i.e., the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and/or New Covenant). Nevertheless, with the inauguration of the New Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant has been terminated (Heb 8:13), while the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants have reached their fulfillment in Christ (Gal 3:16–18; Acts 2:22–36). Thus, until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to judge the living and the dead (Rom 14:10; 2 Cor 5:10; Phil 2:9–11; Heb 9:27–28; Rev 20:11–15), the New Covenant is the only additional covenant that man can enter into. Based on the testimony of Scripture, the only way to enter into this covenant is through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone (Heb 10:19–25).

necessity stems from man's inability to procure eschatological life with his Creator apart from a special manifestation of condescending grace. Indeed, it is through covenant that God brings man's natural religious fellowship to incorruptible and eternal consummation, a reality substantiated via five postlapsarian covenants. Therefore, the *function* of covenant is to mediate special revelation from God to man for the purpose of situating humanity within a distinct covenant, and to effectually draw God's elect to saving faith at the appointed time. The forthcoming chapter will build off these biblical-theological precepts to underscore how the organic production of divine-human covenants is normative, Holy Spirit inspired documents for all believers. Stated differently, the biblical canon is the culmination of God's covenantal self-disclosure.

CHAPTER 3

CANON IS THE CULMINATION OF COVENANTAL REVELATION

In this fallen creation, competing truth claims abound (2 Cor 10:3–5).[1] On a regular basis, billions of human beings utilize their public platform to offer perspective on what constitutes truth in reality.[2] This propensity to acquire and share convictions about the nature of the world reveals man's insatiable hunger for revelation.[3] On the one hand, man yearns for understanding aspects of the world that were not previously ascertained; on the other hand, man delights in sharing with others what he believes to have

[1] Throughout this chapter—and the totality of the thesis—I assume the correspondence theory of truth. George R. Knight explains that the correspondence theory of truth "is a test which uses agreement with 'fact' as a standard of judgment. According to this theory, truth is faithfulness to objective reality." George R. Knight, *Philosophy & Education: An Introduction in Christian Perspective* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 2006), 25. As an aside, it must be acknowledged that from a Christian perspective, truth may be defined in terms of both *coherence* and *correspondence*. That is to say, truth both coheres within God's eternal plan and knowledge of himself, in addition to corresponding with a reality that has been fashioned in accordance with God's eternal plan and knowledge of himself. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this chapter, the latter dimension of truth has received special emphasis.

[2] According to a 2021 study cited by the University of Maine, an estimated 4.48 billion people use social media worldwide, and "the average social media user engages with an average of 6.6 various social media platforms." The significance of these statistics indicate that most human beings have a desire to express their opinions in the public square. In some way or another, all opinions that are shared will reveal *something* about the nature of how one understands the world in which they live (i.e., how they understand truth in reality). "Social Media Statistics Details," University of Maine, accessed January 25, 2023, https://umaine.edu/undiscoveredmaine/small-business/resources/marketing-for-small-business/social-media-tools/social-media-statistics-details/.

[3] While there are many viable definitions for the term revelation, *Random House Webster's College Dictionary* definition is employed at this point in the thesis: "The act of revealing or disclosing; a striking disclosure, as of something not before realized." *Random House Webster's College Dictionary* (New York: Random House, 1992), 1152. This generic definition from a secular resource is further employed by Walter A. Elwell: "The term *revelation* means intrinsically the disclosure of what was previously unknown. In Judeo-Christian theology the term is used primarily of God's communication to humans of divine truth." Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 1021.

discovered about the *cosmos*.[4] Thus, humanity engages in a perpetual cycle of imparting to others what they believe to have uncovered as truth.[5] Yet whether realized or not, perceptions of reality are never reducible to brute facts.[6] On the contrary, *every* idea in the public square assumes validation by an *ultimate authority*.[7] Lest epistemological

[4] The *purpose* undergirding the *process* of pursuing, obtaining, and sharing truth is helpfully expressed by John M. Frame: "What use is [truth-seeking]? Aristotle's answer, at the beginning of his *Metaphysics*, is perhaps best: 'all men by nature desire to know.' As Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay climbed Everest 'because it is there,' so all normal human beings have a desire to understand their environment." John M. Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2015), 3.

[5] Paul Kjoss Helseth reveals that despite his commitment to the Reformed Christian tradition, B. B. Warfield recognized that "men of all sorts . . . work side by side at the common task of building up the temple of truth." Paul Kjoss Helseth, *"Right Reason" and the Princeton Mind: An Unorthodox Proposal* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2010), 97. Stated differently, regardless of religious commitments, the endeavor to discover and dispense truth is proper to the entire human race. For more on Warfield's contention, see Helseth, *"Right Reason" and the Princeton Mind*, 96–103.

[6] In the realm of philosophy, considerable ink has been spilled to explicate the notion of *brute facts*. At bottom, those who would affirm the validity of brute facts would broadly define them as facts that cannot be explained; they simply are what they are. An extensive treatment on proposed understandings and necessary entailments of brute facts can be found in Elly Vintiadis and Constantinos Mekios, eds., *Brute Facts* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2018). Conversely, Greg L. Bahnsen unveils a conceptual contrast of how brute facts are perceived from a Reformed Christian viewpoint:

> For the Christian, all the facts are part of God's personal plan and serve His personal purpose; all of the laws by which we relate the facts (whether conceptually, logically, or causally) are a reflection of God's personal mind and His ordering of reality. Man's mind was created to imitate God's thinking with respect to these personally qualified facts and personally qualified laws. God's personal influence over all the objects of knowledge as well as the mind of man, and His purpose to have man understand and control the facts of his environment, provide for the possibility of the mind accurately apprehending the extramental world. Every thing and every event must be ultimately related to God (who controls the relations between things and between events) in order to be a part of a coherent and intelligible system. But for the non-Christian, the impersonal, spatio-temporal universe either exists by itself or is intelligible in itself, without reference to God. Things and events are simply what they are, with no need for (or possibility of) more basic explanation. The facts are "brute"—that is, particulars unrelated to any plan or interpretation. The universe consists of purely random matter, moving completely according to chance. The connecting links between brute facts—whether concepts or laws—exist apart from God as abstract, impersonal, and apparently self-existent universals. Facts and events cannot be known, much less interpreted, in advance, thus making any hypothesis as credible as any other hypothesis prior to investigation and/or prior to historical evaluation. (Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1998], 279)

[7] An *ultimate authority* is the final, internally self-authenticating standard whereby all metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical claims about reality are evaluated and tested for verification or falsification. One's ultimate authority will be the final source that is appealed to for *justifying* one's beliefs

justification is not desired, people must eventually explain their justification for what they believe—and why they believe what they believe—when pressed to do so.[8] The answer given in response to such inquiries will inevitably reveal the identity of one's ultimate authority.[9]

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about *anything*. Bahnsen thoughtfully delineates some key elements directly associated with ultimate authorities:

> Appeals to fact [in reality] will be arbitrated in terms of the conflicting presuppositions held by [Christian and non-Christian] philosophies; the debate between the two perspectives will thus eventually work down to the level of one's ultimate authority. . . . Every argument chain must end in a self-authenticating starting point; every worldview has its unquestioned and unquestionable assumptions, its primitive commitments. All [ideological] debate will develop into a question of ultimate authority. (Greg L. Bahnsen, *Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith*, ed. Robert R. Booth [Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Foundation, 2011], 68–69)

[8] The designation *epistemological justification* has often been used interchangeably with *propositional knowledge*. Steven B. Cowan and James S. Spiegel define these synonymous terms as "justified true belief." Steven B. Cowan and James S. Spiegel, *The Love of Wisdom: A Christian Introduction to Philosophy* (Nashville: B & H, 2009), 65. Cowan and Spiegel likewise note that this definition of epistemological justification/propositional knowledge goes back as far as the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, thereby signifying its status as the traditional way of understanding this concept (65). In their efforts to substantiate the aforementioned definition, Cowan and Spiegel set forth the following proposal:

> We should distinguish between *thinking* that you know something and really knowing it. Having a true belief . . . is not sufficient for having knowledge. Consider the following case. John gets a fortune cookie at his neighborhood Chinese restaurant which reads: "You will soon receive a great reward." On the basis of this fortune cookie, John comes to believe that he will win the state lottery. As it happens, the next day John does indeed win the lottery. He believed he would win and his belief was true. But, did he *know* he would win the lottery? No way. A person might come to have a true belief as a result of luck on the basis of a source known to be unreliable. In such cases, as with John, we would not say he has knowledge. Whatever knowledge is, it cannot simply be a matter of luck. Besides true belief, then, what else is required for knowledge? The answer is that a person also needs *some reason or justification for holding the belief*; some reason, that is, for thinking that the belief in question is true. (66)

[9] While many *authorities* can be appealed to for shaping beliefs about reality, they will always function in subservience to whatever epitomizes one's *ultimate authority*. Even if one is not self-aware of what constitutes their ultimate authority, eventually, an ultimate authority will be pinpointed to substantiate what they believe and why they believe what they believe. Greg Bahnsen illustrates this principle:

> Every system [of thought] must have some unproven assumptions, a starting point not antecedently established, with which reasoning begins and according to which it proceeds to conclusions. Therefore, all argumentation over ultimate issues of truth and reality will come down to an appeal to authorities, which, in the nature of the case, are ultimate authorities. . . . [All people have] a final authority to which [they] appeal in order to defend the world-view that embraces [their] interdependent metaphysic and epistemology. When two people . . . are arguing, their ultimate authorities will be distinguishable by what they refuse to impugn or contradict in the long run. They may be moved to abandon secondary authorities along the way, but that which is the last "fortress" to fall, that consideration whose veracity they will assert to the dire end, that which governs and qualifies all higher movements of thought and

By God's perfect providence, human beings have not only been exposed to divine revelation in nature and in covenant (Ps 19:1–14),[10] but mankind has also received an ultimate authority containing inerrant, infallible, and God-breathed revelation (2 Tim 3:16–17).[11] This ultimate authority is the objective grounds for affirming and understanding God's self-disclosure manifested throughout the universe, in addition to clarifying how divine-human covenantal relationships should be perceived.[12] What is the

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> argumentation, constitutes their [ultimate] authority. (Greg L. Bahnsen, *Presuppositional Apologetics: Stated and Defended*, ed. Joel McDurmon [Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2020], 89)

[10] Psalm 19 is a striking portrayal of the distinction between how God reveals himself to all image bearers in creation (i.e., general revelation), and how God reveals himself to those who have access to his Word (i.e., special revelation). As encapsulated in the text, vv. 1–6 reveal the Psalmist's awareness of God's grandeur manifested throughout the world he has created for his own glory. In doing so, the focus is on the beauty and intricacy of creation that can be plainly observed by all people around the world (regardless of if they have ever heard of biblical Christianity). Furthermore, the Psalmist's usage of the least specific designation for God (El) in v. 1 accentuates the motif for the first half of Ps 19; namely, general revelation showcasing God's glory as Creator. On the other hand, vv. 7–14 punctuate the supremacy of special revelation for enabling man to know God in a personal and covenantal way. This can be seen from the Psalmist's frequency in lauding the Word of God throughout the second half of Ps 19, along with the divine name revealed to God's Old Covenant people (YHWH) being invoked seven times in vv. 7–14. Surveying these observations from the text showcases God's intentionality to reveal himself in *every* facet of his handiwork. For a more thorough commentary on Ps 19, see Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 15 (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity, 2008), 115–18.

[11] These convictions drawn from 2 Tim 3:16–17, and other passages of Scripture, are codified in "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 21, no. 4 (December 1978): 289–96. For example, an incisive overview of the intersection between biblical inerrancy, biblical infallibility, and biblical inspiration can be seen in section 1 of "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy":

> God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself . . . Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms, obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises. . . . Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives. (289–90)

[12] Because of man's fall into sin, the unregenerate person will naturally suppress and reject God's revealed truth in creation (Rom 1:18–32). As a result of his inherent inclination to distort, dismiss, and disregard the testimony of natural revelation—in supplementation to the absence of *redemptive truth* in nature—unregenerate man cannot be saved merely as a result of being exposed to God's self-disclosure in creation. Thus, sinners need directing to an objective solution for rectifying their dire spiritual condition: God's gracious provision of special revelation. Although God's special revelation encompasses theophanies, direct communications with man, the establishment of covenants, and the execution of miracles, Scripture

identity of the ultimate authority hitherto described? It is none other than the canon of Scripture: the thirty-nine Old Testament and twenty-seven New Testament books comprising the Holy Bible.[13] Organically building on the argumentation from chapter 2, assessing the nature and function of the aforementioned documents will display how the biblical canon is the culmination of God's covenantal revelation.

However, before rightly apprehending the relationship between God's covenantal revelation to man and the written documents bearing witness to such disclosure, it is essential to confirm Scripture's viability as the ultimate authority for Christianity.[14] Ergo, this chapter will feature an examination of the canon's formation *prior to* inspecting

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ought to be regarded as the consummate source of God's special revelation to man (e.g., see chap. 1n93) because knowledge of the former instantiations of special revelation is largely contingent on the latter. Without Scripture's unchanging written account of how God has worked in history to redeem his people, and how the significance of God's acts of redemption ought to be understood, sinful humanity would be largely without hope for their spiritual torpidity. Moreover, since the Bible contains the only message leading to salvation (Rom 1:16–17)—and since belief unto salvation results in spiritual illumination (1 Cor 2:14–16)—Scripture is also vital for understanding why general revelation functions as it does in the first place. Stated differently, Scripture (as special revelation) elucidates other forms of special revelation while further clarifying the nature, purpose, and function of general revelation. For a brief analysis of how general and special revelation relate to Scripture as the Christian's *ultimate authority*, see Wayne A. Grudem, *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 56–58. A lengthier discussion on the foregoing tenets is exhibited in Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Revelation and God*, vol. 1 of *Reformed Systematic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 177–315.

[13] In contrast to Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy's affirmation of the Apocrypha as canonical Scripture, this specific conception of the biblical canon is characteristic of Protestantism. As will be seen later in chap. 3, the validity of this understanding of canon will be defended from a biblical, theological, and historical vantage point. Additionally, substantial attention will be allocated throughout this chap. to solidify a definition of *canon*, how the canon was formed throughout history, and why the canon should be regarded as the culmination of God's covenantal revelation to his people.

[14] Since the Bible embodies the written word of God, Christians are called to recognize Scripture as the ultimate standard for shaping what they believe, why they believe what they believe, and how to live in this world (e.g., 2 Tim 3:16–17). Albeit this does not mean Christians should abstain from evaluating the content of Scripture, even in the face of objections to biblical fidelity. As with *anything* promoted as an ultimate standard—lest one embraces fideism (i.e., blind faith)—the truthfulness of the Bible should be tested via an internal critique. That is to say, the internal coherence and consistency of Scripture ought to be examined on its own terms to ascertain its warrant as the ultimate standard for Christians. In addition, analyzing the means by which Scripture was formed throughout history is a necessary entailment of investigating whether it is a trustworthy compilation of literature. John M. Frame methodically explains the contours of how Christians can embark on this process in a God-honoring fashion in *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1995), 286–88. Likewise, Brian K. Morley explores this subject in *Mapping Apologetics: Comparing Contemporary Approaches* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015), 73–74.

the connection between God's covenantal revelation in history, and how the Bible testifies thereto. Until one demonstrates *the grounds* for recognizing the biblical canon as God's written word, Christians (and non-Christians) will lack an *objective basis* for surrendering to the covenantal revelation delineated in Scripture.[15] On the other hand, if history can demonstrate the grounds for recognizing the biblical canon as the written word of God—thereby solidifying epistemological justification in the truthfulness of God's covenantal revelation—then the Bible *must* be regarded as normative for the Christian life.[16] By virtue of elaborating on the preceding premises, this chapter will bridge the ideas set forth in chapter 2 with what will come in chapter 4's discussion on the cessation of normative post-apostolic revelation.

The Formation of the Biblical Canon

The concept of an *ultimate authority* is indissolubly bound with the concept of *canon*.[17] In the ancient world, κανών (i.e., *kanon*; canon) originally referred to a reed used as a measuring stick.[18] Over time, the physical function of *kanon* in everyday life

[15] As previously noted in this chap., specifically in n8, there is a distinction between having a true belief and possessing *true knowledge* (i.e., epistemological justification). In this case, one can rightly trust that the Bible is the written word of God regardless of an objective basis being provided to substantiate this conviction. Moreover, the Christian's belief that Scripture is God's written word is not contingent upon how it is received by others; Scripture is God's written word whether it is accepted or rejected as such. Nevertheless, for the Christian to traverse from having true belief to *true knowledge* (i.e., epistemological justification) about Scripture being the written word of God, an objective reason must be offered.

[16] For a reminder of how the term *normative* is being defined in this thesis, see p. 2 of this thesis.

[17] Greg Lanier unpacks how the biblical canon necessitates a recognition of its function as an ultimate authority: "*By definition* Scripture contains within it the irreducibly ultimate authority or jurisdiction over all matters of doctrine and practice. . . . [The Scriptures] have [authority] simply by virtue of what they are. This may sound circular ('Scripture is divinely authoritative because it is Scripture')—because it *is*. But such is true for all ultimate authorities." Greg Lanier, *A Christian's Pocket Guide to How We Got the Bible* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2018), 9–10.

[18] F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1988), 3–4.

began to convey epistemological implications for how one interpreted reality.[19] Just as people would use a *kanon* to measure physical objects, so also would people use a *kanon* to make sense of the world in which they lived.[20] From this standpoint, *kanon* came to epitomize the *norma normans non normata*; *kanon* was seen as an ultimate authority for every facet of one's life.[21] For millennia, a principal conviction of Christians has been that God has established a *kanon* to shape all matters pertaining to life and godliness (2

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[19] The historical evolution of how *kanon* was defined throughout antiquity is documented in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*:

> [Kanon] first takes on a more general sense when used for a measuring rod or ruler, e.g., as used in architecture. . . . This type of expression soon acquired a figurative as well as the original technical application, being used in the most varied spheres of life. Hence ὁ κανών becomes the "norm," whether the perfect form and therefore the goal to be sought on the one hand, or the infallible criterion (κριτήριον) by which things are to be measured on the other. (Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966], 3:596–97)

[20] A sampling of the multifaceted ways in which *kanon* was perceived in the ancient world is demonstrated by a glimpse into the numerous ways it was utilized within Christian contexts. John D. Meade and Peter J. Gurry note that some of the most prominent ways believers would use the term *kanon* was in reference to (1) a literal measuring rod; (2) the rule of the Christian tradition; (3) the formal decisions made by church councils; and (4) the books that are encapsulated in the Old and New Testaments. John D. Meade and Peter J. Gurry, *Scribes and Scripture: The Amazing Story of How We Got the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 108. Thus, Christians often used *kanon* interchangeably to allude to declarative and objective standards that were relevant to their faith. If this was the case within distinctively Christian contexts, how much more could this pattern be expected in contexts where the term *kanon* was originally coined?

[21] To be sure, when compared to the philosophical and theological milieu surrounding the first century world, there were unique dimensions to how the concept of *kanon* functioned in the minds of Christians. For example, John K. Papadopoulos notes at least eleven distinct ways in which *kanon* was applied throughout the Greco-Roman world and beyond: (1) "any rule or law"; (2) "a fundamental principle"; (3) "a standard or criterion"; (4) "an ecclesiastical rule or law enacted by a council or other authority"; (5) "the body of ecclesiastical law"; (6) "the books of the Bible recognized by the Christian church as genuine or inspired"; (7) "any officially recognized set of sacred books"; (8) "the body of works of a writer—or artist—generally accepted as genuine"; (9) "a catalog or list"; (10) "[a form of liturgy]"; (11) "a kind of composition in which the same melody is played or sung through two or more voice parts at the same or at a different pitch overlapping each other." John K. Papadopoulos, "Canon Creation/ Destruction in Cultural Formation: Authority, Reception, Canonicity, Marginality," in *Canonisation as Innovation*, ed. Damien Agut-Labordère and Miguel John Versluys (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 16–17. Despite these nuances of comparing how *kanon* was perceived in the ancient world, the unifying theme was that *kanon* referred to "something that is authorized." As noted by Papadopoulos, "what always lurks behind [definitions of canon] is authority" (17).

Pet 1:2–3): His inerrant, inspired, and infallible written word (Ps 119:160; John 17:17).[22] Yet, what was the process whereby God provided and preserved his canonical revelation? How can one *objectively know* that the content of the Holy Bible is in keeping with the divine intent? This chapter will now turn to these important questions.

How the Old Testament Was Formed

In chapter 2 of this thesis,[23] attention was directed to explaining the redemptive-historical significance of divine-human covenants.[24] Scripture repeatedly divulges how God enters into covenantal relationships with his people, redeeming and sanctifying them by his spoken word.[25] Thus, God graciously condescends to his people

[22] God's people have always been marked by a commitment to the biblical canon as the ultimate authority for doctrine and practice. This reality is punctuated by Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield:

> The assumption of the divine authority of the scriptural teaching underlies all the credal statements of the church; all of which are formally based upon the Scriptures. And from the beginning, it finds more or less full expression in them. Already, in some of the formulas of the faith which underlie the Apostles' Creed itself, we meet with the phrase "according to the Scriptures" as validating the items of belief; which in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, amid the meagre clauses outlining only what is essential to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, place is given to the declaration that He is to be found speaking in the prophets. . . . Needless to say that a no less firm conviction of the absolute authority of Scripture underlies all the Protestant creeds. Before all else, Protestantism is, in its very essence, an appeal from all other authority to the divine authority of Holy Scripture. The Augsburg Confession, the first Protestant creed, is, therefore, commended to consideration, only on the ground that it is "drawn from the Holy Scriptures and the pure word of God." The later Lutheran creeds, and especially the Reformed creeds, grow progressively more explicit. . . . Thus, in every way possible, the church has borne her testimony from the beginning, and still in our day, to her faith in the divine trustworthiness of her Scriptures, in all their affirmations of whatever kind. (Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* [Louisville: SBTS, 2014], 110–12)

[23] While there are numerous references to the nature and function of divine-human covenants throughout chap. 2 of this thesis, the bulk of attention is encapsulated on pp. 48–75.

[24] As developed throughout this section, a Protestant perception of the Old Testament will be advanced and defended. In keeping with the broader Protestant consensus on this subject, a distinctly Particular Baptist articulation of the Old Testament canon is encapsulated in chap. 2, para. 2 of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689). The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith in Modern English, "Chapter 1–The Holy Scriptures," Founders Ministries, accessed September 12, 2023, https://founders.org/library/chapter-1-the-holy-scriptures/.

[25] Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley discuss God's work of redemption and sanctification in *Spirit and Salvation*, vol. 3 of *Reformed Systematic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 93–115. However, their insight is especially clarifying on this particular point: "Since the fall of man, the creative Spirit [of God] has been acting to restore the fallen world, beginning with the patriarchs and old covenant

through covenantal revelation and then God faithfully fulfills his covenantal obligations through specific acts in the world.[26] As showcased throughout the biblical record, God's works in creation on behalf of his people are inextricably linked to the covenantal word imparted to them.[27]

However, the people with whom God originally inaugurated covenants would not live forever, nor would they be able to perfectly recall every minute covenant stipulation.[28] For the sake of those not immediately present when divine-human covenants

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Israel" (94). This excerpt illustrates the outworking of how redemption and sanctification are uniquely affixed to postlapsarian, divine-human covenants prior to the coming of Christ.

[26] Kevin J. Vanhoozer's treatment of word-act conceptualizations gets to the heart of how God fulfills the requirements of his covenant obligations to his people. That is to say, God's words interpret God's works and God's works confirm God's words. In the context of describing the Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New Covenants, Vanhoozer elaborates on this biblical-theological reality:

> At the heart of [God's relationship to the world] is a series of divine promises and fulfillments. The divine will-to-promise is not a gesture of oppression, a violent imposition of power, but a gesture of generosity, an initiative taken on behalf of another. . . . There are several noteworthy features in [the covenantal examples] of divine promising. First, the dramatic action [in history] begins with a divine promise. Second, the promise is on nothing in return. Third, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is a God who keeps his word. This God proves to be true (faithful, reliable) because his word is his bond. (Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005], 135–36)

[27] Chap. 2 of this thesis introduces the reader to salient contours of every divine-human covenant recorded in Scripture: the Covenant of Works, the Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and the New Covenant (identified as the Covenant of Grace). Therefore, consulting pp. 48–75 should further illuminate how God's covenantal word to his people stands in relationship to the works he carries out on behalf of his people in creation.

[28] In recent years, renowned New Testament critic Bart D. Ehrman has argued that the general unreliability of human memory necessitates seeing the Bible as a compilation of generally unreliable documents. Ehrman devotes ample attention to this thesis in *Jesus before the Gospels: How the Earliest Christians Remembered, Changed, and Invented Their Stories of the Savior* (New York: HarperOne, 2017). As an unbeliever, Ehrman's work is littered with naturalistic presuppositions and demonstrates an unwillingness to seriously consider rebuttals from those who believe the Bible is God's written word. If one operates from Ehrman's worldview at the outset of evaluating the reliability of human memory, then his conclusions are largely consistent with his presuppositions. On the other hand, if one operates from a Christian worldview, it is not an issue to affirm that the God who created all things *ex nihilo* can supernaturally enable men to recall details to mind with exact precision (e.g., John 14:26). Moreover, God can also use ordinary means to ensure his eternal purposes are flawlessly accomplished, such as through the oral preservation of his Word in ancient near east settings or through documenting historical information that would later comprise written Scripture. For a sample of the former scenario, see Kenneth E. Bailey, "Informal Controlled Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels," *Themelios* 20, no. 2 (January 1995): 4–11. For an analysis of the latter scenario, see Paul D. Wegner, *A Student's Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible: Its History, Methods and Results* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 58–86. Therefore, despite

were enacted, and for the sake of future generations being aware of how they relate to divine-human covenants, God led his people to transcribe the covenantal details with absolute precision.[29] When perusing the authorship,[30] transmission,[31] and preservation[32] of the biblical documents from a historical vantage point, the grounds for seeing them as God's ultimate authority is bolstered.[33] This is first seen as the case when surveying the formation of the Old Testament.

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the limitations of human memory in a fallen world, Christians can embrace viable supernatural and/or natural explanations for why the biblical documents contain dependable testimonies.

[29] Paul D. Wegner features an illuminating treatment of how God's people stored covenantal and historical information as the Old and New Testaments were being developed (i.e., prior to their formal canonization) in *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 73–240. Wegner's volume assembles an abundance of biblical evidence to showcase how intentional God's people were in meticulously recording details that pertained to their covenantal relationship with the Most High, as well as in documenting information surrounding important historical events. Wegner's observations confirm that God's special revelation was recorded with exceedingly great care by his appointed writers.

[30] The authorship of the biblical documents refers to the Holy Spirit inspired and inerrant autographs produced by the individual(s) who originally wrote them. This distinction is helpfully teased out by Greg L. Bahnsen in "The Inerrancy of the Autographa," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 150–93.

[31] The glossary of terms section in *Exploring Christian Theology* defines biblical transmission as the "process of copying ancient writings with a view toward preserving them, distributing them more widely, and passing them to the next generation. Prior to the printing press (c. 1450), this was done with the Old Testament and New Testament documents by hand." Holsteen and Svigel, *Revelation, Scripture, and the Triune God*, 268.

[32] Biblical preservation speaks to how the Holy Spirit inspired words of the original autographs remain in the collection of surviving manuscript copies. A synonymous designation for this fact is *biblical tenacity*. James R. White sheds light on this terminology: "The nature of [Scripture] in tenaciously preserving [its] readings gives us confidence that the original readings, even in the context of variation, remains in the manuscript tradition." James R. White, *The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust the Modern Translations?* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany, 2009), 306–7.

[33] Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix attest that the Old and New Testament manuscripts discovered outnumber surviving literary works from human antiquity by the thousands. In addition, the surplus of biblical manuscript copies has greatly aided the science of textual criticism (i.e., comparing copies of written documents to establish the most reliable reading in the original text). Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *From God to Us: How We Got Our Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 2012), 175–209. Ellis R. Brotzman and Eric J. Tully state that textual criticism has revealed surviving Old Testament manuscript copies to be "substantially the same as the [original] autographs written so many years ago." Ellis R. Brotzman and Eric J. Tully, *Old Testament Textual Criticism: A Practical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 35. Regarding the New Testament, K. Martin Heide asserts that the New Testament text is 92.6 percent stable. K. Martin Heide, "Assessing the Stability of the Transmitted Texts of the New

Although one cannot be sure of the *exact* dating of the Pentateuch's authorship,[34] it was likely developed between the years 1446 and 1210 BC.[35] Despite dissenting claims made by higher critical, post-Enlightenment scholars, the internal testimony of the Old and New Testaments indicate that Moses is to be credited with penning the Torah.[36] Given the sizable compilation of events predating the life of Moses—and the transcription of the Mosaic writings—Old Testament scholars are often left to speculate how the Pentateuch

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Testament and *The Shepherd of Hermas*," in *The Reliability of the New Testament: Bart D. Ehrman & Daniel B. Wallace in Dialogue*, ed. Robert B. Stewart (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 138. These vignettes magnify the certitude that one can dismiss the truthfulness of the Bible's message, but one cannot overlook how well it has been transmitted and preserved for millennia.

[34] The Pentateuch (i.e., "five books"; πεντάτευχος) encapsulates Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. As seen in this chap., the term *Pentateuch* is used interchangeably with *Torah* to describe the same concept. To peruse a helpful resource on the structure of the Hebrew (i.e., Old Testament) canon, see Roger T. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 154–66.

[35] This date range is fluid depending on whether one takes an early (1446 BC) or late (1260 BC) date view of the Exodus. The *ESV Study Bible* provides biblical and historical arguments for/against each respective view, acknowledging that "both the early date and the late date [view of the Exodus] are supported by established evangelical scholars today." *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 33. For a balanced and scholarly level treatment of debates surrounding the dating of the Exodus, see T. J. Betts, "Dating the Exodus," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 3 (2008): 82–95.

[36] Lee Martin McDonald observes that the designation Torah (i.e., "Law"; תורה) has historically been utilized as a synonym for *Pentateuch*. Lee Martin McDonald, *The Origin of the Bible: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 11. Thus, when these terms appear interchangeably throughout this thesis, they are being used to refer to the same reality (i.e., Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). Additionally, it is important to note that when the Bible attributes the development of the Torah to Moses, it is positing him as its *essential author*. For example, a passage such as Deut 34 was likely not written by Moses because it is a description of his death. Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks also argue that there are places within the Pentateuch that might have been modified or edited in post-exilic contexts. Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 21–29. Nevertheless, Richard McDonald emphasizes that additions and editions to the Torah do not undermine its essential Mosaic authorship, literary unity, or status as divinely inspired; rather, each of the aforementioned distinctives of Moses's writings can still be championed on the basis of internal and external evidence. Richard McDonald, "Did Moses Write All of the Pentateuch? (Even His Own Obituary?)," *Southern Equip*, June 26, 2020, https://equip.sbts.edu/article/moses-write-pentateuch-even-obituary/. For an assessment of internal evidence, the following texts provide a snapshot of how the Bible assumes *essential Mosaic authorship*: Exod 34:27; Num 33:1–2; Deut 31:24; Josh 1:7; Judg 3:1–4; 1 Kgs 2:3; 2 Chron 23:18; Ezra 3:2; Neh 8:1; Dan 9:11; Mal 4:4; Mark 12:26; Luke 16:29–31; John 1:45; 7:19–22; Rom 10:5; Heb 9:19. Conversely, for an assessment of external evidence, consider Geerhardus Vos, *The Mosaic Origin of the Pentateuch Codes* (New York: A. C. Armstrong, 1886).

was formulated in its earliest stages.[37] Extensive arguments have been developed to advocate for the use of oral tradition to circulate the earliest history of the human race and of God's covenant people.[38] Furthermore, the Hebrew language's roots in ancient Canaanite culture raise the question as to whether Moses had written documents to glean from as he chronicled the historical narratives of Genesis, and the opening chapter of Exodus.[39] Scripture also makes clear that there were occasions in which God specifically told Moses what to write down for the purpose of instructing his people (Exod 17:14;

[37] Depending on one's interpretation of Gen 1–11, and subsequent timeline for Gen 12–50, the events described in those passages would have transpired centuries or millennia prior to the birth of Moses. If *essential Mosaic authorship* is affirmed (as it is in this thesis), then the challenge becomes explaining how Moses obtained correct information related to people and events that preceded him by a significant period of time. This section of the thesis attempts to set forth three tenable explanations within the bounds of Protestant orthodoxy.

[38] According to Lee Martin McDonald, "several scholars have observed that before the Jewish scriptures were written, much of what was in them circulated among the Jews in oral traditions and were passed on for centuries through memory." Lee Martin McDonald, *The Formation of the Biblical Canon* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2021), 1:124. As previously cited in n27 of this chapter, the use of and dependence on preserving historical data within oral tradition continues to be modeled in contemporary ancient near eastern settings. While such methodologies do not produce the *ipsissima verba* (exact words) of a narrative or discourse, they do preserve the *ipsissima vox* (exact voice) of a narrative or discourse. A helpful explanation of how the *ipsissima verba-ipsissima vox* distinction is fleshed out in the authoring of Scripture can be found in Darrell Bock, "The Words of Jesus in the Gospels: Live, Jive, or Memorex," in *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*, ed. Michael J. Wilkins and James Porter Moreland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 73–101.

[39] Since Abraham moved to Canaan shortly after receiving God's covenant promise (Gen 12:1–9), and in light of the Patriarchs' frequent exposure to Canaanite culture (e.g., Abraham: Gen 13:12; 16:3; Isaac: 31:18; Jacob: 33:18; 35:6; 37:1; Joseph's brothers: 42:5–13; 45:17–25), it is *possible* that there were written documents from which Moses could have compiled the history of prior generations. The reason for proposing the preceding connection is based on John Sailhamer's insights: "The Hebrew language is at least four thousand years old [and] the language itself is that of the people who lived along the western seaboard and inland foothills of ancient Syria and Canaan. Scientifically, ancient Hebrew is classified as a Canaanite language." John Sailhamer, *How We Got the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 30. As intriguing as this prospective connection is to ponder, no extant manuscripts have been discovered to definitively prove (1) whether Moses used written documents to guide him in authoring Genesis or (2) what written documents Moses would have had at his disposal. For exposure to the historical origins and development of the Hebrew language—specifically within ancient Canaanite cultural settings—see Aaron Demsky, "A Proto-Canaanite Abecedary Dating from the Period of the Judges and Its Implications for the History of the Alphabet," *Tel Aviv* 4 (1977): 14–27; Bruce K. Waltke and Michael Patrick O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 3–4.

24:4; 34:27; Num 33:2; etc); perhaps God could have also done this for elucidating the history antecedent to Moses.[40]

In the final analysis, it is likely best to retain an open-mindedness to a mixture of the possibilities suggested above.[41] The internal evidence of Scripture and the external evidence from ancient Near East studies demonstrate a multiplicity of viable explanations for the Pentateuch's formulation.[42] Moreover, believers have recognized the writings of

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[40] John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue offer a potential explanation for how Moses could have known what to write in the book of Genesis:

> It is possible that Moses composed Genesis partially on the basis of records to which he would have had access during his studies in Egypt. It is also possible that Moses's training included exposure to other ancient near eastern treaties and legal codes that to some degree influenced his composition of the judicial sections of the Law. At the same time, Moses had a recurrent experience of direct access to God during the time when he wrote the *Pentateuch*. As a result, he did not ultimately depend on external sources. The first five books of the Bible are the work of God and Moses at one and the same time. (John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017], 85)

[41] As reflected throughout Robert L. Plummer's succinct treatment of the Pentateuch's composition, since Genesis "describes events from thousands of years prior [to Moses' life] . . . it is almost certain that many oral and written sources underlie our current text. Of course, Moses' selection or editing of such sources took place under God's superintendence." Robert L. Plummer, *The Story of Scripture: How We Got Our Bible and Why We Can Trust It* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013), 13.

[42] Another intriguing theory surrounding Moses's development of the Pentateuch is the Wiseman Hypothesis/Tablet Theory. In juxtaposition to the Jahwist/Yahwist-Elohist-Deuteronomist-Priestly (JEDP) Theory of Pentateuchal composition championed by theologically liberal Old Testament scholars, Terry Mortenson and Bodie Hodge discuss some of the most compelling arguments for seeing the Wiseman Hypothesis/Tablet Theory as a credible alternative:

> The [Tablet Theory] is based on the Hebrew word *toledoth*, which appears 11 times in Genesis (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 36:9; 37:2) and helps to tie the whole book together as a single history. Our English Bibles translate *toledoth* variously as "this is the account" or "these are the generations" of Adam, Noah, Shem, etc. Scholars disagree about whether each *toledoth* follows or precedes the text with which it is associated, though we are inclined to agree with those scholars who conclude the former. In this case, the name associated with the *toledoth* is either the author or custodian of that section (see, for example, table 2 below). Regardless, the 11 uses of *toledoth* unite the book as a history of the key events and people from creation to the time of Moses. Unlike the JEDP model, the [Tablet Theory] shows a reverence for the text of Genesis and attention to these explicit divisions provided by the book itself. These divisions represent either oral tradition or written texts passed down by the Genesis patriarchs to their descendants, which Moses then used to put Genesis into its final form under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. . . . Just as Christian authors today can quote truthful statements from non-Christian sources without thereby endorsing their wrong ideas, so the biblical authors could quote non-believers or non-biblical sources without introducing false statements into their divine writings (e.g., Josh. 10:13; 2 Sam. 1:18; Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12; Jude 14–15). So it is perfectly reasonable to think that Moses wrote Genesis from pre-existing, well-preserved oral tradition and/or written documents from the patriarchs. (Bodie Hodge and Terry Mortenson,

Moses as divinely dispensed oracles from the time of Joshua, to the coming of Christ, and to the present day.[43] Thus, upon surveying the historical formation and reception of the Torah, there are credible grounds for regarding these writings as an ultimate authority (i.e., canonical) for God's people.

The second predominant category of Old Testament documents to consider as an ultimate authority for God's people is the Nevi'im (Prophets).[44] In their original constitution within the Hebrew Bible, the literature comprised in the Nevi'im was a chronological continuation of what encompassed the Torah.[45] When considered holistically, the Nevi'im was originally divided into two particular subunits: (1) The Former Prophets, containing the books of Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, and 1–2 Kings; and (2) The Latter Prophets, incorporating Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Book of the

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"The Documentary Hypothesis: Moses, Genesis, and the JEDP," in *Already Compromised*, by Ken Ham, Greg Hall, and Britt Beemer [Green Forest, AR: Master, 2011]: 221–23)

[43] Aside from the Torah itself, consider the following Old Testament evidence for recognizing the writings of Moses as authoritative revelation for the people of God: Josh 1:8; 8:31–32; 1 Kgs 2:3; 2 Kgs 14:6; 21:8; 2 Chron 34:14; Ezra 6:18; Neh 13:1; Dan 9:11–13; Mal 4:4. The New Testament also affirms Moses's writings as authoritative literature in several places: Matt 19:8; Mark 12:26; Luke 20:37; 24:27; John 5:45–47; 7:19; Acts 3:22; 15:21; Rom 10:5; Heb 10:28. Furthermore, the church catholic (i.e., universal) has formally affirmed the corpus of Mosaic literature as canonical Scripture for millennia. A sampling of how the writings of Moses have been received across Jewish, Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Greek Orthodox lines is featured in Edmon L. Gallagher and John D. Meade, *The Biblical Canon Lists from Early Christianity: Texts and Analysis* (New York: Oxford University, 2019), xx–xxi.

[44] The following works comprise the נביאים (Prophets): Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Interestingly, in contrast to English Bibles, there is no distinction between "first" and "second" Samuel or "first" and "second" Kings in the Hebrew Bible. To peruse a helpful resource on the structure of the Hebrew (i.e., Old Testament) canon, see Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon*, 154–66.

[45] Wegner observes that the organization of the Old Testament within the Hebrew Bible results in the Pentateuch and the Prophets enveloping the history of God's covenant people from the creation of the universe to the reign of the Persian Empire (539–330 BC). Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations*, 40. At the very least, depending on one's view of the timetable undergirding Genesis, these two portions of Old Testament books cover several thousands of years.

Twelve.[46] A comparison of the Nevi'im and Pentateuchal writings reveal similarities and differences in authorship, transmission, and preservation.

Regarding authorship—despite the overwhelming attribution of the Torah to Moses—large portions of the Nevi'im's Former Prophets stem from an unknown author(s), whereas scholars have ascertained the authorship of the Latter Prophets with considerable certainty.[47] The transmission of the Nevi'im is congruous with the Pentateuch inasmuch as it features a significant utilization of paleo-Hebrew on comparable writing materials, but contrarily, the Nevi'im also employs square-script Hebrew and Aramaic dialect in the manuscripts produced at a later time.[48] From a preservation perspective, the internal testimony of the Nevi'im mirrors how chunks of the Pentateuch were composed; reliable

[46] Robert Beckwith observes that the twofold breakdown of the Nevi'im is structured in accordance with historical narrative and oracular (legal) emphases. He notes that the Former Prophets cover successive periods of history from Israel's entrance into the promised land to their time in Babylonian exile, whereas the Latter Prophets are primarily divine declarations of judgment and hope for God's Old Covenant people. Beckwith's reflections on the composition of the Nevi'im helpfully explains the textual and logical basis for the Former/Latter Prophets division. Robert T. Beckwith, "Formation of the Hebrew Bible," in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading & Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism & Early Christianity*, ed. Martin Jan Mulder and Harry Sysling (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 57–58.

[47] Despite ample speculation by Old Testament scholars, the following books in the Nevi'im were written by an author that has not been definitively identified: Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, and 1–2 Kings (i.e., the Former Prophets). Conversely, there is significant grounds for objectively identifying the authors of every book found in the Latter Prophets. For a helpful synopsis of the key issues pertaining to the authorship of these works, see their respective overviews provided in R. C. Sproul, ed., *The Reformation Study Bible* (Sanford, FL: Ligonier, 2019).

[48] Timothy Paul Jones offers the following explanation for the gradual shift in writing style, and the inclusion of a different biblical language:

> When we consider how the Old Testament was written, it's helpful to know that today's "square-script Hebrew" characters aren't the same letters that the Old Testament authors knew and used. Most of the Old Testament writings would have been written first in "paleo-Hebrew" characters. It wasn't until sometime after the sixth century B.C. that Jewish scribes began to write Hebrew words using a square-script alphabet that they borrowed from the Assyrians. This alphabet developed into the script that people identify as Hebrew today. It's also important to know that not all of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew. During their decades of exile, the Jewish people learned Aramaic, a language that was common in ancient commerce and diplomacy. . . . It's not surprising, then, that some segments of the Old Testament ended up in Aramaic (Jer. 10:11; Dan. 2:4–7:28; Ezra 4:8–6:18; 7:12–26). (Timothy Paul Jones, *How We Got the Bible* [Peabody, MA: Rose, 2017], 36–37)

oral and written sources were consulted as deemed necessary by the inspired authors.[49] Yet unlike the Torah, it would take a lengthier period of time for Old Covenant believers to corporately revere the Nevi'im as divinely authoritative.[50] Given the preceding similarities and differences between the Pentateuch and the Nevi'im, it is remarkable to behold the Old Testament's unity in the midst of a diverse process of formation.[51] Since

[49] McDonald indicates that the Torah, and a substantial section of the Nevi'im (i.e., Genesis to 2 Kings), embody "the most stable part of the Jewish scriptures." McDonald, *The Formation of the Biblical Canon*, 1:58. He draws this conclusion based on Israel's utilization of "repeated traditions that included mostly oral stories and some widespread institutions or practices repeated again and again in the ever-changing situations of the people" (1:58). Moreover, when examining the internal evidence from the Nevi'im, it is clear that an abundance of written sources was in circulation at various points during the history of Old Covenant Israel (e.g., the Book of Jasher- Josh 10:13; the Book of the Acts of Solomon- 1 Kgs 11:41; the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah; 1 Kgs 14:29; etc). This intertextual observation further demonstrates that the biblical authors had numerous written and oral resources at their disposal throughout the process of writing Scripture. For a more expansive list of extrabiblical sources referenced in the Nevi'im, see Lee Martin McDonald, "Recognizing Jewish Religious Texts as Scripture," in *Ancient Jewish and Christian Scriptures: New Developments in Canon Controversy*, by John J. Collins, Craig A. Evans, and Lee Martin McDonald (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2020), 52–53.

[50] As was the case with select New Testament writings during the Patristic era of church history (e.g., the Muratorian Fragment's omission of Hebrews, James, and 1–2 Peter), it took some time before God's people regarded the Nevi'im as equally authoritative as the Pentateuch. Lee McDonald underscores the Israelites' eventual reception of the Nevi'im:

> It may be, as some argue, that the Former (or Early) Prophets (Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, and 1–2 Kings) were collected by and circulated among the Jews in the late sixth century to early fifth century B.C.E., but it is quite another matter to say that they were [initially] recognized as sacred Scripture on par with the Law of Moses. . . . The Law and the Former Prophets began to acquire a primitive form of canonical authority, or canonization, for the Jews who survived the traumatic experience of exile in Babylon. . . . The language of the Latter Prophets was remembered after the exile and the rebuilding of the nation precisely because those prophets who had once spoken a message to them now seemed all the more credible and relevant. (Lee Martin McDonald, *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011], 77–78)

As will be argued later in this chapter—after consulting the historical process whereby the biblical canon was formed—just because a text is not *initially* or *unanimously* received as divinely authoritative does not mean it is not so. On the contrary, regardless of the opinions of man, God's Word is absolutely authoritative in and of itself. Nevertheless, history shows that God's people can be slow to give proper credence to his self-disclosure.

[51] Even though various authors contributed to the Nevi'im over multiple centuries of time, in supplementation to the wide-ranging emphases that are noticeable in their writings, this portion of the Old Testament exhibits a remarkable unity and consistency of thought. The commentary provided in the *ESV Study Bible* punctuates this distinctive of the Nevi'im:

> Despite the differences [of each book's emphasis], all of these books present history from a God's-eye view. That is, they are not "history for history's sake," but rather, they are *theological* in nature. They tell about God's repeated in-breakings into history, whether by dramatic accounts of miracles, or by God's speaking directly to his people, or by his indirect presence, visible in the providential

both of these sections in the Old Testament stand in harmony with one another, God's old *and* new covenant people have historically perceived them as absolutely authoritative (i.e., canonical) documents.[52]

The final section of the Old Testament canon is classified as the *Ketuvim* (*Writings*).[53] When compared to the Torah and the Nevi'im, the Ketuvim is characterized as being the most textually diverse; there are poetic, cantillate, and historic books in this facet of the Old Testament.[54] Additionally, this portion of the Old Testament includes documents that were potentially penned as early as the tenth century BC (or even earlier), and as late as the turn of the fourth century BC.[55] As such, the Ketuvim contains texts that

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> outworking of events. And, in the telling of all these events, the authors' perspectives are God's perspectives. So it should not surprise us that many of the books' themes echo each other and also carry forward some of the great themes of the Pentateuch. (*ESV Study Bible*, 386)

[52] A portrait of how the Nevi'im has been received across Jewish, Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Greek Orthodox lines is featured in Gallagher and Meade, *The Biblical Canon Lists*, xx-xxi. In God's providence, the anthology of literature found in the Nevi'im has been revered by billions of people—believers and unbelievers alike—for millennia.

[53] The following texts comprise the כְּתוּבִים (*Ketuvim*): Ruth, 1–2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, and Daniel. Interestingly, in contrast to the English Bibles, there is no distinction between "first" and "second" Chronicles in the Hebrew Bible. Furthermore, in the Hebrew Bible, Ezra and Nehemiah are likewise a single book. To peruse a helpful resource on the structure of the Hebrew (i.e., Old Testament) canon, see Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon*, 154–66.

[54] The poetic books of the *Ketuvim* are Job, Psalms, and Proverbs. The cantillate books of the *Ketuvim* are Ruth, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Lamentations. The historic books of the *Ketuvim* are 1–2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel. Greg Goswell notes that the multilayered dimensions to the *Ketuvim*—poetry, music, and history—imply that it is designed to serve as a closure to the Hebrew canon, bridging significant themes and genres that are present across the *Pentateuch* and *Nevi'im.* Greg Goswell, "The Order of the Books in the Hebrew Bible," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51, no. 4 (December 2008): 686.

[55] Depending on when one dates select Psalms (e.g., Ps 90 is attributed to Moses), the contents of the *Ketuvim* can be dated with the following approximations derived from Eugene Merrill, Mark Rooker, and Michael Grisanti:

> Poetic books—Job: Although it is impossible to be completely sure, scholars have argued for a date of authorship as early as the Patriarchal era, or as late as 200 BC (500–501); Psalms (final composition): Late sixth century B.C. (514–15); Proverbs: Tenth century B.C. (Eugene Merrill, Mark Rooker, and Michael Grisanti, *The World and The Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* [Nashville: B & H, 2011], 528–29)
>
> Cantillate books—Ruth: Although it is impossible to determine with absolute certainty, scholars have argued for a dating commensurate with Proverbs (i.e., tenth century B.C.) (300–301); Esther: Fifth

were written (1) prior to the pre-exilic division of Israel into the northern and southern kingdoms; (2) during Israel's Assyrian and Judah's Babylonian captivities; and (3) in reflection on God's covenant people being subjected to tenuous exilic contexts.[56] Assessing the authorship, transmission, and preservation of the Ketuvim further validates its place in the Old Testament canon.

Whereas the bulk of the Ketuvim's authorship remains a mystery, there are several legitimate reasons for affirming its canonical status.[57] God's people had corporately affirmed the contents of the *Ketuvim* as authoritative (i.e., canonical) revelation by the

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century B.C. (354–55); Ecclesiastes: Written during Solomon's day (i.e., tenth century B.C.) (540); Song of Solomon: Written during Solomon's day (i.e., tenth century B.C.); Lamentations: Sixth century B.C. (555–56).

Historic books—1–2 Chronicles: Due to its close connection with Ezra and Nehemiah, scholars have suggested the fifth century B.C. (330–31); Ezra: Fifth century B.C. (343–44); Nehemiah: Fifth century B.C. (343–44); Daniel: Sixth century B.C. (405–7).

[56] Pre-exilic *Ketuvim* works (prior to c. 722 BC): Ruth, Job (possibly), Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon; Exilic *Ketuvim* works: (c. 722 BC-586 BC): Psalms, Lamentations, and Daniel; Post-exilic works (after c. 538 BC): 1–2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, and Job (possibly). Insofar these dating approximations are correct from Jessica Curiel et al., it can be deduced that the *Ketuvim* literature was extensively codified in the generations subsequent to the Davidic kingdom. Jessica Curiel et al., *Rose Chronological Guide to the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Rose, 2019).

[57] At the very least, the 1947 discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls reveal that *every* work in the Hebrew Old Testament—apart from Esther—was held in high enough esteem to be transmitted and preserved amongst the Jews for generations leading up to the first century of the common era (i.e., CE). Although several non-canonical works were likewise included in the Dead Sea Scrolls, this does not mean the Jewish community of faith was oblivious to their authoritative (i.e., canonical) standard for doctrine and practice (e.g., see next footnote). When taken together, this historical evidence simply attests to the diligence of God's people to maintain literature that they deemed valuable. On this point, the "Devil's advocate" may posit that the motivation for protecting this array of works could be as trivial as sentimentality, or as serious as viewing the writings as God's authoritative self-disclosure. In response, it could just as easily be argued that the protection of the Hebrew Old Testament—along with other prominent ancient works—is no different than a pastor desiring to protect his favorite Bible along with his favorite systematic theology textbook. In each of the aforementioned cases, both works are *highly esteemed*, but they are by no means *equally esteemed*; there is no reason to suggest a synonymous distinction would not have been made regarding the assortment of Dead Sea Scrolls. For more insight on how to carefully analyze the relationship between authoritative writings and the uncovering of the Dead Sea Scrolls, see James C. VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Bible* (Grand Rapid: William B. Eerdmans, 2012), 66. Note: Just because surviving manuscripts of Esther were not discovered with the Dead Sea Scrolls does not mean this book's canonical status should be altogether disregarded. Greg R. Lanier and William A. Ross contend that despite the book of Esther's canonicity being subjected to debate over the centuries, the three-fold canon of the Hebrew Bible (i.e., Law, Prophets, and Writings) is what was embraced by the earliest Christian communities (including that of Jesus and Paul). Greg R. Lanier and William A. Ross, *The Septuagint: What It Is and Why It Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 170–71.

turn of the first century BC, in conjunction with the books included in the Torah and Nevi'im.[58] The archival, theological, doxological, and practical relevance of these writings motivated Old Covenant believers to preserve them for contemporary and future utilization.[59] In God's perfect providence, the fruit of these efforts continues to be evident as one sees how the Ketuvim fits within the completed Old Testament record, thereby

[58] One of the most compelling arguments for the canonicity of the *Ketuvim* stems from its position in the Septuagint, and from how the Jewish communities leading up to the time of Christ perceived the authority of the Septuagint. Between the third and second centuries BC, translation efforts were conducted to for the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek by multilingual Jews. The finished product came to be known as the Septuagint (LXX; "Seventy") by virtue of an ancient tradition claiming that a group of seventy-two Jewish scholars translated the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek over a span of seventy two days. Although many scholars debate the historicity of this tradition, this designation for the Greek translation of the Old Testament has stuck for millennia. With this historical background in mind, the substance of the Septuagint contained the thirty-nine books found in the Hebrew Old Testament, along with Apocryphal works. Nevertheless, the Jewish consensus was that the Apocryphal works were not to be regarded as canonical (i.e., authoritative) Scripture; only the thirty-nine books of the Hebrew Bible functioned as normative and written special revelation from God. Lanier and Ross make these observations at several points, although the appendix section is a particularly useful summary. Lanier and Ross, *The Septuagint*, 195–202. In addition to Lanier and Ross's volume, the history of the *Septuagint* can be further explored in Jennifer Dines, *The Septuagint*, ed. Michael A. Knibb (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 27–39.

[59] By archival, it is meant that the *Ketuvim* features literature that documents pertinent facets of Israel's history (e.g., 1–2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel). From a doxological framework, the bulk of the *Ketuvim* provides works employed to lead the nation of Israel in corporate worship ascribed to God (e.g., Ruth, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Lamentations). And as with all of God's written special revelation, the *Ketuvim* is thoroughly theological inasmuch as it communicates truth about the nature/character of God, and practical inasmuch as it directs man in how he is to live in accordance with God's prescribed will. Each of the aforesaid elements of the *Ketuvim* manifest its authoritative (i.e., canonical) role for the individual believer, and for the corporate people of God. Stephen G. Dempster reiterates these distinctives about the *Ketuvim*—and the totality of the Old Testament:

> A recently published document from Qumran (4QMMT) . . . which is approximately dated from the early first century BCE to the mid-second century BCE, has been the subject of many studies on the canon. The letter addressed to a leader apparently intends to impress upon him that the Scriptures were being fulfilled. The relevant reference has been partially reconstructed, so there is some doubt about its actual form. The reference states that if the leader believes that the Scriptures are being fulfilled, he will be able to "understand the Book of Moses [and] the Book[s of the P]rophets and Da[vid]." The word "understand" suggests a discerning study much like Daniel's study of authoritative books. Later, in a restored passage, the fulfillment of the prophecies predicted "[in the Book of Moses and the words of the Prophets]" are regarded as coming true. . . . The editors of 4QMMT were quick to identify the significance of this and observed that here was evidence for a third division of the Scriptures, with "David" referring to the Scriptures later known as the Hagiographa [i.e., *Ketuvim*]. . . . The community at Qumran had as its raison d'être the study of such books. (Stephen G. Dempster, "Torah, Torah, Torah: The Emergence of the Tripartite Canon," in *Exploring the Origins of the Bible: Canon Formation in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Emanuel Tov [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008], 114–15)

concretizing the ultimate authority for God's Old Covenant people.[60] Yet in light of the New Covenant epoch of redemptive history, the ultimate authority for believers also encompasses New Testament documents. Thus, an evaluation of those documents is now in order.

How the New Testament Was Formed

A holistic analysis of the New Testament's formation unveils notable differences from how the Old Testament came together.[61] The Old Testament was composed in two languages and was assembled over several millennia; the New Testament was composed in one language and developed in a span of less than a century.[62] The Old Testament documents were authored and edited by dozens of people; the New Testament documents can be attributed to roughly ten human authors.[63] The Old Testament features the establishment of five divine-human covenants; the New Testament features the establishment of one divine-human covenant.[64] The Old Testament storyline recalls events

[60] I acknowledge that myriads of Old Covenant believers lived without having access or exposure to the fullness of God's special revelation (e.g., those alive during the time of Moses did not have access to the book of Daniel). Moreover, a plethora of New Covenant believers residing in the first century AD did not have access to the comprehensive New Testament (e.g., Stephen was not alive when the Pastoral Epistles were authored). Nevertheless, God holds all believers accountable to heeding whatever special revelation they are exposed to during their lifetime (Deut 6:4–9; Jas 4:17).

[61] As developed throughout this section of the thesis, a Protestant perception of the New Testament will be advanced and defended. In keeping with the broader Protestant consensus on this subject, a distinctly Particular Baptist articulation of the New Testament canon, is encapsulated in the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689): The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith in Modern English, "Chapter 1– The Holy Scriptures," chap. 1, para. 2.

[62] Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth* (Colorado Springs: Victor, 1991), 15–16.

[63] These approximations are noted by Jones, as he provides overview charts of every biblical book's author, along with their projected date of authorship. Jones, *How We Got the Bible*. The Old Testament charts can be found on pp. 31–33, and the New Testament charts can be found on pp. 75–77. Additionally, Henrietta C. Mears employs synonymous estimations for the amount of biblical authors in *What the Bible Is All About: Bible Handbook* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2002), 15–16.

[64] For an interaction with the divine-human covenants depicted in Scripture, see pp 48–75 of this thesis.

pertaining to several global superpowers across the known world; the New Testament storyline centers on the stable rule of the Roman Empire.[65] Yet despite these contrasts, believers have affirmed the New Testament documents as being equally as reliable as the Old Testament—and equally the written word of God—for nearly two millennia (1 Thess 2:13; 1 Tim 5:18; 2 Pet. 3:16).[66]

Mirroring the Old Testament's canonical constitution, it has been suggested that the New Testament canon can be understood through a tripartite lens:[67] (1) Gospels and

[65] A clarifying visual canvass of the intersection between global superpowers and Old/New Testament history can be found throughout Collin Hansen et al., *Rose Book of Bible & Christian History Timelines: More Than 6000 Years at a Glance* (Torrance, CA: Rose, 2006). This publication features a twenty-foot timeline, with a surplus of annotations to highlight prominent redemptive historical events over the course of six millennia.

[66] It can rightly be said that, in a sense, the New Testament is "greater" than the Old Testament in that the New Testament brings the Old Testament to fulfillment due to the coming of Christ. Nevertheless, all of Scripture is equal in its inerrancy, inspiration, infallibility, and status as the written Word of God. James Orr expresses the historic Christian perspective on the Bible's unity across the Old and New Testaments despite unique variations of factors such as authorship and historical context:

> The Bible is the record of God's revelations of Himself to men in successive ages and dispensations (Eph. 1:8–10; 3:5–9; Col. 1:25f.), till the revelation culminates in the advent and work of the Son, and the mission of the Spirit. It is this aspect of the Bible that constitutes its grand distinction from all collections of sacred writings—the so-called "Bibles" of heathen religions—in the world. These, as the slightest inspection of them shows, have no unity. . . . The Bible, by contrast, is a single book because it embodies such a revelation and exhibits such a purpose. The unity of the book, made up of so many parts, is the attestation of the reality of the revelation it contains. (James Orr, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1939], 1:491)

[67] Gregory Goswell argues for seeing the structure of the Old and New Testaments as analogous to one another. According to Goswell, the Torah would correspond to the Gospels; the Former Prophets would correspond to the book of Acts; the Latter Prophets would correspond to the New Testament epistles; and the Writings (especially Daniel) would correspond to the book of Revelation. Gregory Goswell, "Two Testaments in Parallel: The Influence of the Old Testament on the Structuring of the New Testament Canon," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56, no. 3 (2013): 465. Similarly, Wegner posits a tripartite New Testament structure (e.g., Gospels and Acts; Epistles; Revelation) in *The Journey from Texts to Translations*, 55–59. See also Stephen G. Dempster, "Canon and Old Testament Interpretation," in *Hearing the Old Testament: Listening for God's Address*, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew and David J. H. Beldman (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2012), 154–79.

Acts;[68] (2) Epistles;[69] and (3) Apocalypse.[70] Such a framework is especially fitting given the way those categories of literature function in relationship to magnifying the Lord Jesus Christ.[71] Namely, whereas the Old Testament predicted him, the Gospels and Acts revealed him, the Epistles explained him, and the Apocalypse (Revelation) expects his return.[72] Reflecting on the authorship, transmission, and preservation of the New Testament further reveals the grounds for seeing it as a trustworthy assortment of God's special revelation in writing.[73]

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[68] This thesis affirms the historic Protestant conception of the New Testament Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) and the book of Acts.

[69] This thesis affirms the historic Protestant conception of the New Testament Epistles: Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1–2 Thessalonians, 1–2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, and Jude.

[70] This thesis affirms the historic Protestant conception of the New Testament Apocalyptic literature: the book of Revelation.

[71] Stephen Wellum masterfully teases out how New Testament revelation builds off the Old Testament, thereby demonstrating that Scripture is *Christocentric* (i.e., Jesus is at the center of God's written word) and *Christotelic* (i.e., God's plan for redemptive history, beginning in creation, reaches its *telos* in Christ). Stephen Wellum, "From Alpha to Omega: A Biblical-Theological Approach to God the Son Incarnate," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 63, no. 1 (2020): 71–94. Wellum's following comments are especially incisive:

> In sum, it is [the] covenantal storyline that serves as the background, framework, theology, and worldview to the NT's presentation of Jesus, and how all Scripture reveals Christ's identity as God the Son incarnate. In the OT, it is there, but concealed even in its revealing through the covenants, the unfolding of the divine promise, and the patterns/types that point forward to Christ's coming. But now in the "Word made flesh" (John 1:14), what was there, but concealed, is now unveiled with fuller clarity of understanding (John 1:14–18; Heb. 1:1–3). (90–91)

[72] Alistair Begg further expounds on Christ's relationship to the biblical record in *Preaching for God's Glory (Today's Issues)* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 36.

[73] Acquiring and confirming epistemological justification about the world is directly tied to corroborating the viability of one's *ultimate authority* through subjecting it to an internal critique (see nn. 7–8 of this chap.). Based on what was shown through this chapter's analysis of the Old Testament's authorship, transmission, and preservation, there are credible reasons—rooted in history—for recognizing it as a well-preserved record of divine revelation. Although unbelievers will not be persuaded by the testimony of those documents apart from the work of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 1:18–31; 2:6–16), believers can be encouraged by a consideration of the Old Testament's formation. It is my prayer that believers will be equally encouraged by this chapter's exploration of the New Testament's authorship, transmission, and preservation.

Although distinct in genre, substantial overlap in authorship can be observed upon investigating the varied literature found in the New Testament.[74] The continuities in authorship can be explained by the prompt production of the New Testament (written in less than forty years), in addition to the New Testament's concentrated focus on delineating germane theological and practical implications associated with the final covenant epoch of redemptive history.[75] Furthermore, the testimony of church history reveals that every

[74] The overlap in New Testament authorship stems from Jesus's intentionality to appoint those who would oversee the writing of canonical, Holy Spirit inspired documents throughout the first century AD. In a word, Jesus authorized the production of what would ultimately become the New Testament. Herman Ridderbos further unpacks this line of reasoning:

> For the *communication* and *transmission* of what was seen and heard in the fullness of time, Christ established a *formal authority structure to be the source and standard for all future preaching of the gospel*. From the beginning of His public ministry, we see Jesus intent on sharing His own power (*exousia*) with others so that this authority would take visible, tangible shape for the foundation and extension of the church on earth. In that connection, *the apostolate* in particular should be noted. Jesus surrounded himself with twelve disciples whom He "appointed that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach" (Mark 3:14). . . . We can establish that the apostles' role in the history of redemption was unique and unrepeatable. Because they not only received revelation but were also the bearers and organs of revelation, their primary and most important task was to function as the foundation of the church. To that revelation Christ binds His church for all time; upon it He founds and builds His church. (Herman Ridderbos, *Redemptive History and the New Testament Scriptures*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin, trans. H. De Jongste [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1988], 13, emphasis original)

[75] A few comments can be made regarding the elapsed time for the New Testament's authorship and the narrow focus allocated toward the New Testament's message. Essential to the New Testament's purpose was its witness to the theological and practical significance of the New Covenant's redemptive-historical inauguration in Christ's blood (Luke 22:20; Heb 8:6–13). Michael J. Kruger expounds on this connection:

> Given that the earliest Christians were distinctively Jewish in their heritage, they naturally understood the activity of Jesus and the inaugurated kingdom of God through the category of God's covenantal promises. . . . Indeed, so close is the relationship between the covenant and the written documentation of the covenant that the Old Testament authors would frequently equate the two—the covenant, in one sense, *is* a written text. . . . This Old Testament covenant background provides strong historical reason for thinking that early Christians would have had a predisposition toward written canonical documents and that such documents might have arisen naturally from the early Christian movement. At a minimum, the covenantal context of early Christianity suggests that the emergence of a new corpus of scriptural books, after the announcement of a new covenant, could not be regarded as entirely unexpected. (Michael J. Kruger, *The Question of Canon: Challenging the Status Quo in the New Testament Debate* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013], 58–59, 61–62)

In supplementation to Kruger's insights, the timing of the New Testament's authorship is worthy of attention. Since the New Testament's writing was tethered to the group of men that Christ appointed for oversight (see previous footnote), the range of time that the New Testament could be established was substantially shorter than what was experienced throughout the formation of the Old Testament. Arguably the clearest limiting factor for producing a completed New Testament was the lifespan of potential authors because New

New Testament book was either authored by an apostle, or by a direct contemporary of an apostle.[76] This means that the New Testament documents can ultimately be traced back to people who knew Christ personally, or to individuals who were close associates with those who knew Christ personally.[77] These men were chosen, called, and set apart by their Lord for the inestimable task of expounding the new covenant revelation that centered upon Jesus Christ.[78] In other words, the New Testament was not randomly written in a vacuum; it was a careful synthesis of eyewitness testimony and reliable source material

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Testament documents could not be produced apart from apostolic oversight. This is a good and necessary conclusion advanced in 1 Clement 42:1–2, an extrabibical work dated to the late first/early second century AD: "The Apostles received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus the Christ was sent from God. The Christ therefore is from God and the Apostles from Christ." Therefore, if Christ is the One who commissioned the apostles to oversee the production of what would become the New Testament, then the production of New Testament documents would necessarily cease at their death. Based on the testimony of Malcom B. Yarnell, all the apostles had perished prior to the second century AD. See Malcom B. Yarnell III, "The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," in *Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, rev. ed. (Nashville: B & H, 2014), 534.

[76] R. T. Kendall notes that the word "apostle" (ἀπόστολος) means "one who is sent," and refers to the highest office that could be held in the church. R. T. Kendall, *The Means of Developing a Healthy Church in the Twenty First Century*, vol. 2 of *Understanding Theology* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2000), 310. According to Kendall, this office was exclusive to the first century era of church history, and to be an apostle, one had to meet the following biblical qualifications: (1) have seen the Lord (Acts 1:22; 1 Cor 9:1); (2) found churches and oversee them (1 Cor 9:1); (3) overrule when there was division (1 Cor 14:37); and (4) have supernatural gifts (2 Cor 12:12). These foundational elements to apostolic ministry will be further expanded in chap. 4 of this thesis. In the meantime, as further nuanced in the subsequent footnote, the apostles were instrumental in the authorship of the New Testament canon.

[77] Although space prevents an elaborate defense of every New Testament book's authorship, this thesis takes the following positions: Matthew (Gospel of Matthew), John (Gospel of John; 1–3 John; Revelation), Paul (Romans; 1–2 Corinthians; Galatians; Ephesians; Philippians; Colossians; 1–2 Thessalonians; 1–2 Timothy; Titus; Philemon), and Peter (1–2 Peter); these apostles were directly commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ. James (James) and Jude (Jude) were half-brothers of Jesus and served in prominent roles in the first century church alongside the apostles. Mark (Mark) and Luke (Luke) were close contemporaries of the apostles, especially Peter and Paul. Although the authorship of the book of Hebrews is unknown, it has all the markings of apostolicity and has been received as such by the church catholic from the fourth century AD onward. For a helpful treatment of the New Testament's authorship—in keeping with the preceding views—see each of the individual book overviews provided throughout Michael J. Kruger, ed., *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament: The Gospel Realized* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

[78] Gregg R. Allison, *The Church: An Introduction*, Short Studies in Systematic Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 73–74.

that culminated in Spirit-inspired documents for God's people.[79] As such, the ability for early church figures to correctly identify the New Testament authors were bolstered, and the likelihood of the New Testament documents being forgeries or falsities were greatly diminished.[80] Each antecedent observation about the New Testament's authorship persuasively attests to the trustworthiness of its message.[81]

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[79] Richard Bauckham describes how eyewitness testimony and other (written) sources had a complementary function in eventually producing the New Testament:

> In the predominantly oral culture of the ancient world, including the early Christian movement, writing and orality were not alternatives but complementary. . . . We can be fairly confident that some quite sophisticated scribal activity . . . went on at a very early date, presumably in the Jerusalem church, whence its influence can be seen throughout the New Testament writings. . . . In such a context it does not seem unlikely that no one would have even noted down Jesus traditions in notebooks for the private use of Christian teachers. . . . They would simply have reinforced the capacity of oral transmission itself to preserve the traditions faithfully. They should not be imagined as proto-Gospels, though they may account for some of the so-called Q passages where Matthew and Luke are in almost verbatim agreement. . . . There is no doubt that with the composition of these Gospels writing came into its own as means of ensuring the faithful preservation of the Jesus traditions [in the New Testament]. (Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2017], 287–90)

[80] The men who wrote the New Testament were real people, with real friends and family, residing in a real first-century cultural context. As such, they would have been publicly identifiable and recognizable individuals within society and their radical testimonies about Jesus would have been subject to the closest degree of scrutiny. As such, it is far-fetched to postulate that (1) significant ambiguity existed in the first century world as to who wrote the New Testament documents; and (2) that the authors were either mistaken in their reports or just made the bulk of it up on the fly. The substance of such argumentation is generally an attempt to divorce the Jesus of history from the Jesus of faith, as seen in works such as Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1999), 42–53. A rebuttal to this line of reasoning is rooted in the cost experienced by the authors of the New Testament, and through the way the New Testament transformed their lives. On this point, consider the following quote from Gary Habermas:

> There are several reasons why the disciples couldn't have talked each other into [making up the New Testament]. As the center of their faith, there was too much at stake; they went to their deaths defending it. Wouldn't some of them rethink the groupthink at a later date and recant or just quietly fall away? And what about James, who didn't believe in Jesus, and Paul, who was a persecutor of Christians—how did they get talked into seeing something? Further, what about the empty tomb? And on top of that, this view doesn't account for the forthright language of sight in the 1 Corinthians 15 creed and other passages. The eyewitnesses were at least convinced that they had *seen* Jesus alive, and groupthink doesn't explain this aspect very well. (Gary Habermas, quoted in Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998], 324)

[81] For a more expansive portrayal of how the trustworthiness of the New Testament is bolstered by considering its authorship, see the bulk of part 2 in Timothy Paul Jones, *Misquoting Truth: A Guide to the Fallacies of Bart Ehrman's Misquoting Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007), 79–149.

Reminiscing upon the New Testament's transmission cultivates deeper confidence in the reliability of what was originally penned. For starters, although portions of the New Testament were handwritten by an apostle or an individual in close association with an apostle (1 Cor 16:21; Gal 6:11), much of the New Testament's production likely involved select amanuenses (Rom 16:22; 1 Pet 5:12).[82] As such, from the earliest stages of the New Testament's formation, the apostolic testimony was subject to the scrutiny of miscellaneous third party secretaries.[83] After being transcribed in Greek, the original autographs of every work in the New Testament were then copied on sheets of papyrus and hand delivered to churches throughout the first century world.[84] Historical observations such as these speak volumes against the notion that the biblical writers could have

[82] Bruce M. Metzger devotes careful attention to the role that amanuenses played in the New Testament's formation. It was a common practice for individuals to dictate their letters to a scribe in the first century Roman Empire. Bruce M. Metzger, *The New Testament: Its Background, Growth, & Content* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 249–51. With that being said, the use of an amanuensis does not undermine or negate the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. Albert Mohler is insightful on this point: "The actual *text* of the Bible, which bears all the marks of numerous human authors and their own style, language, and context [remains] in whole and in all its parts, nothing less than the Word of God. Albert Mohler, "When the Bible Speaks God Speaks," in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, ed. J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, and Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 38, emphasis added.

[83] F. F. Bruce argues that the majority of the New Testament documents were written and in circulation "twenty to forty years" prior to 100 AD. F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 7. Upon making this contention, Bruce goes on to state that "the first three Gospels were written at a time when many were alive who could remember the things that Jesus said and did, and some at least would still be alive when the fourth Gospel was written" (7). When harmonizing Bruce's commentary on the same page of this volume, it becomes evident that his line of reasoning would likewise apply to the bulk of the New Testament. Inasmuch as Bruce is accurate on these matters, there would have been an abundance of people to implement checks and balances on the New Testament material being disseminated throughout the first century churches.

[84] The process of New Testament transmission is succinctly described by Gary M. Burge, Gene L. Green, and Lynn H. Cohick:

> The earliest copies of important New Testament writings were circulating by the late first century. The first formal printing of the Greek New Testament did not take place until 1516. For 1,400 years, therefore, the New Testament was subject to the hazards of hand-copying. In the earliest centuries, the Christians who produced these manuscripts were well-intentioned, pious believers who wanted to pass on other copies of valuable Christian works. The evidence shows they were incredibly successful, but they did make inevitable minor mistakes, which textual criticism seeks to reverse. (Gary M. Burge, Gene L. Green, and Lynn H. Cohick, *The New Testament in the World of Antiquities: A Survey of the New Testament within Its Cultural Contexts* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007], 442)

whimsically concocted false stories about Jesus.[85] The deployment of the Roman Empire's common language, coupled with figures who could corroborate what was being copied and written from the outset, substantially reduces the basis for questioning the New Testament's veracity.[86]

The earliest followers of Jesus Christ portrayed a commitment to ensuring the original New Testament autographs were not only copied for distribution throughout the first century church, but that they were preserved for the spiritual benefit of future generations (Col 4:13–17; 1 Thess 5:27).[87] In the providence of God, the early church recognized the self-authenticating nature of writings connected to the apostles, resulting in

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[85] A striking late first century example of how the New Testament authors were perceived by their contemporaries is expounded by F. F. Bruce:

> [Paul's] letters, whether as entire documents or in fragments, were carefully collected. . . . When Clement of Rome wrote in the name of the Roman church to the church of Corinth in about A.D. 96, he plainly had access to a copy of the letter which we know as 1 Corinthians, for he quotes it freely, reminding the Corinthian Christians that they should have paid more attention to what their apostolic founder had said to them forty years before. (F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* [Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2000), 465]

Based on these musings from Bruce, would the first century church have esteemed the writings and authority of Paul—along with the other New Testament authors/writings—if they did not view them as trustworthy? It is the perspective of this thesis that such a question must be answered with a resounding "no."

[86] For a detailed historical explanation of the intersection between a common language in the Roman Empire and the transmission of a reliable New Testament, see Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism*, trans. Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 48–56.

[87] The bulk of the Patristic era (especially the second, third, and fourth centuries AD) reveals the commitment exhibited by Christians to distribute copies of New Testament writings to churches being planted in various parts of the ancient world, and to safeguard copies for perpetual usage in those churches. McDonald expresses this pattern carried out by the early church in *The Formation of the Biblical Canon*, 2:60–87. Based on what can be discerned from the earliest stages of church history, it becomes clear that Christians (1) recognized the value and importance of accurately copying and preserving the New Testament writings for the continual edification of the church; and (2) recognized the intrinsic authority embedded within the New Testament writings, which ultimately motivated them to allocate such care to the copying and preservation of those writings. While it is certainly true that other *non-canonical* writings were valued—and by extension, copied and preserved—by the early church, the volume of attention directed to the New Testament writings vastly overshadows any other literature prevalent during the second-fourth centuries AD. These principles are further explicated in a blog post I authored for a doctoral seminar at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Dewey Dovel, "Understanding the Origins, Development, and Trustworthiness of the New Testament Canon: Part 4," Covenant Confessions, August 17, 2021, https://covenantconfessions.com/understanding-the-origins-development-and-trustworthiness-of-the-new-testament-canon-part-4/.

their reception as qualitatively equivalent to the Old Testament documents.[88] By virtue of the aforementioned conviction, the New Testament eventually became the most well-preserved literary work of human antiquity.[89] In the final analysis, if anything written prior to the printing press is to be renowned for its trustworthiness of content or preservation of intended message, then the New Testament must be esteemed as the *crème de la crème*.[90] In keeping with the conclusions derived from inspecting the

[88] Michael J. Kruger unpacks how the New Testament's self-authenticating nature and connection to the apostles entailed its corporate reception by the earliest believers:

> Central to the self-authenticating model of canon is the conviction that canonical books are recognized not only by their historical authenticity (apostolic origins) or their ecclesiastical acceptance (corporate reception), but fundamentally by the nature of their *content* (divine qualities). If these books are constituted by the work of the Holy Spirit, then Christians, who are filled with the Holy Spirit, should be able to recognize that fact (Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012], 158)

[89] According to Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, there had been 5,735 manuscripts of the Greek New Testament catalogued in 2003. These manuscripts were anywhere from fragments of a portion of Scripture to entire books of the New Testament. Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (New York: Oxford University, 2005), 50. Although James B. Prothro recently contended that scholars should refrain from providing definitive numbers of itemized New Testament manuscripts, he concedes the prevalence of over 5,000. James B. Prothro, "Myths About Classical Literature: Responsibly Comparing the New Testament to Ancient Works," in *Myths and Mistakes in New Testament Textual Criticism*, ed. Elijah Hixson and Peter J. Gurry (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2019), 81. Regardless of one's convictions about the reliability of the New Testament's message, scholars of believing or unbelieving postures will affirm it as the most well-preserved literary corpus in human antiquity.

[90] This thesis wholeheartedly endorses the inerrancy, infallibility, and inspiration of the original manuscripts produced by the biblical authors. As such, a fundamental presupposition of the thesis is that the profusion of New Testament manuscripts is a persuasive argument for the reliability of its message. Be that as it may, it would be disingenuous to suggest that enhanced quantities of New Testament manuscripts *guarantee* the fidelity thereof. Jacob W. Peterson opines on this matter:

> In the negative, manuscripts alone cannot prove the truth of Christianity. What manuscripts can do is provide evidence of a reliable text. A reliable text attested by thousands of manuscripts is just that: a reliable *text*. But a reliable text is not a guarantee of reliable content. Just as a reliable text of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* still requires interpretation and verification to assess its historicity, so also does the New Testament. Having a reliable enough text is undoubtedly important, because without it arguing for the accuracy of its material would be impossible. Yet providing arguments for the trustworthiness of a text's actual claims is not something with which textual criticism can help. Those types of important arguments must come from other fields of inquiry (Jacob W. Peterson, "Math Myths," in Hixson and Gurry, *Myths and Mistakes* 68–69)

As a corollary to Peterson's preceding remarks, chap. 3 of this thesis has sought to demonstrate historical evidences for affirming the reliability and trustworthiness of the Old and New Testaments. Thus, while many Christians may find these arguments compelling and persuasive, they must never be perceived as infallible.

formation of the Old Testament, Christians can likewise claim epistemological justification for seeing the New Testament as their ultimate authority and as God's written self-disclosure.[91]

Reflecting on Old and New Testament Apocryphal Literature

The antecedent sampling of the Old and New Testament's formation has been conducted through a Protestant lens. Thus, since the Apocryphal books penned prior and subsequent to the New Testament are not encapsulated in the Protestant canon, it is necessary to offer justification for why these works should not be seen as God's inerrant, infallible, inspired, and normative self-revelation.[92] In the space below, consider five prominent reasons why Protestants have historically rejected literature comprising the Old and New Testament Apocrypha as canonical Scripture:[93]

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[91] At this point in chap. 3, a historical consideration of the Old and New Testament's authorship, transmission, and preservation have solidified the grounds for believers to regard Scripture as the written Word of God. By subjecting the *ultimate authority* for Christian doctrine and practice to an internal critique, the epistemological basis for surrendering to God's covenantal revelation expounded in the Bible has been cemented. The intersection between God's covenantal revelation and the biblical canon is probed under chap. 3's heading "The Connection Between God's Covenantal Revelation and the Biblical Canon."

[92] The designation "Old and New Testament Apocryphal Literature" comes from Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations*, 119–62. The classification of Old Testament Apocryphal literature refers to fifteen works produced during the Intertestamental period (c. 400 BC to c. AD 25), and the label New Testament Apocryphal literature pertains to dozens of writings produced in the centuries subsequent to the apostolic era (c. AD 100 and beyond). For the sake of space, only the Old Testament Apocryphal literature and the New Testament Apocryphal Gospels have been listed in this footnote. For a more exhaustive compilation of New Testament Apocryphal literature, see McDonald, *The Formation of the Biblical Canon*, 2:165–66. Wegner also provides a catalogue of Old and New Testament Apocryphal work: "Old Testament Apocryphal Literature: Tobit; Judith; Wisdom of Solomon; Ecclesiasticus/Sirach; 1 Maccabees; 2 Maccabees; Baruch; Epistle of Jeremiah; Additions to Esther; Prayer of Azariah and Song of the Three Young Men; Susanna; Bel and the Dragon; 1 Esdras; 2 Esdras; Prayer of Manasseh." Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations*, 120. Wegner also explains, "New Testament Apocryphal Literature (Sample): Gospel of the Ebionites; Gospel of the Hebrews; Gospel of the Nazoreans; Gospel of Nicodemus; Gospel of Peter; Infancy Gospel of Thomas; Protoevangelium of James" (160–61).

[93] In an effort to review and synthesize *some* of the most compelling reasons for rejecting the Old and New Testament Apocrypha's canonicity, several publications were consulted. Thus, the five arguments presented at this point in the thesis are consistent with what can be seen in Gallagher and Meade, *The Biblical Canon Lists*, 1–56; Richard A. Muller, *Holy Scripture: The Cognitive Foundation of Theology*, vol. 2 of *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 108–10, 374–94; Arthur G. Patzia, *The Making of the New Testament: Origin, Collection, Text & Canon* (Downers Grove,

1. The Old and New Testament Apocryphal literature is never explicitly cited as divinely inspired Scripture in the works comprising the thirty-nine-book Old Testament canon, and the twenty-seven-book New Testament canon.[94]

2. The internal evidence of the Old Testament Apocrypha reveals that none of these works claim to be the word of God, in contradistinction to many Old Testament works (e.g., Num 35:1; Josh 1:1; Isa 1:10; Jer 1:2; Ezek 1:3; Hos 1:1; Joel 1:1). Additionally, while the New Testament Apocrypha contains many alleged works and events from the life of Christ, none are confirmable by the authors or content of the New Testament record.[95]

3. There are significant inconsistencies throughout the Old and New Testament Apocryphal works, which necessarily calls into question their legitimacy as the written word of God.[96]

IL: IVP, 2011), 23–44, 165–91; William A. Webster, *The Church of Rome at the Bar of History* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1996), 7–14; Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations*, 119–62.

[94] A potential objection to this argument is that there are times in the Bible where non-canonical works are favorably cited to substantiate what is being said by the author or speaker (e.g. Josh 10:13; 1 Kgs 11:41; Acts 17:28; Jude 1:14–15; etc.). However, there is a distinction between simply affirming truth in extrabiblical sources and equating such sources with divinely inspired Scripture. In God's common grace, he has allowed unbelievers and non-inspired sources to promote—and discover—truth in a fallen world. In every instance that a non-canonical source is referenced in Scripture, it is never insinuated by the biblical author or speaker that such source(s) is inspired by God. A helpful explanation of the preceding principles can be reviewed in Michael Green*, 2 Peter and Jude*, IVP Commentary, vol. 18 (Nottingham, England: IVP, 2009), 67–68.

[95] A potential objection against this argument is that not *every* book in the Old and New Testament claims to be the word of God. However, this objection can be refuted based on at least two factors. First, as they were produced throughout history, the Old Testament canonical works were collectively received, affirmed, and preserved by believers as divinely inspired Scripture. At no point prior to the coming of Christ did God's people collectively acknowledge the Old Testament Apocryphal works as God's written word. When considering how Christians understood the New Testament canon over the second, third, and fourth centuries AD (see pp. 102–4 of this thesis), much of the same can be said regarding the New Testament Apocryphal writings. Second, the ability to authenticate the legitimacy of the Old and New Testament documents was contingent upon God's people confirming the validity of what was being transcribed therein. When viewed through a historical lens, the fidelity of Old and New Testament Apocryphal literature was questioned by prominent church fathers due to the inability to corroborate what was recorded. On this point, Michael J. Kruger cites the following individuals to underscore trustworthiness concerns about the Old and New Testament Apocryphal documents: Melito of Sardis, Origen of Alexandria, Eusebius of Caesarea, Athanasius of Alexandria, Cyril of Jerusalem, Epiphanius of Salamis, Hilary of Poitiers, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Jerome of Stridon. Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 201.

[96] It is outside the scope of this thesis to expound *every* inconsistency that can be seen in the Old and New Testament Apocryphal documents. Thus, for further exploration, Wegner provides a thorough treatment of key chronological, geographical, and theological errors contained in the Old Testament Apocryphal writings in *The Journey from Texts to Translations*, 125. In addition, Bruce M. Metzger exposes a plethora of theological inconsistencies within the New Testament Apocryphal literature in *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (New York: Oxford University, 1992), 165–89.

4. Although localized church councils differed on the canonical status of the Old Testament Apocrypha throughout church history, universal acceptance of their canonical status was not attained by an ecclesiastical body until the Council of Trent (1546). On the other hand, the New Testament Apocryphal works have never received ecclesiastical affirmation as canonical Scripture at any point in church history.[97]

5. The origins of the Old and New Testament Apocryphal literature cannot be definitively traced back to God's covenant community of faith. As such, these writings do not represent the culmination of God's covenantal revelation to his people and are not to be regarded as an ultimate (i.e., canonical) authority for believers.[98]

While each of the aforementioned arguments are viable grounds for rejecting the canonicity of the Old and New Testament Apocryphal writings, the fifth contention is architectonic to what has been postulated thus far into the thesis. Against the backdrop of God's covenantal self-revelation delineated in chapter 2, this chapter has now offered a historical survey and confirmation of the sixty-six-book canon of Scripture.[99] In doing so, the Protestant Christian has validation for embracing Scripture as the ultimate authority for

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[97] Until the Council of Trent, there was never a *formal* or *ecclesiastical declaration* of canonical Scripture in church history. Some would likely point to the Councils of Laodicea (AD 363), Hippo (AD 393, and Carthage (AD 397) as a rebuttal to this argument. However, such councils were not only confined to a localized region (i.e., they were not ecumenical church councils), but they also did not result in unanimity of opinion regarding the biblical canon (e.g., Augustine and Jerome were contemporaries who disagreed on the canonical status of Old Testament Apocryphal writings). Ironically, these observations are endorsed in Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianites: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (New York: Oxford University, 2005), 231.

[98] According to Metzger, the Apocryphal contents were "hidden or withdrawn from common use because they were regarded as containing mysterious or esoteric lore, too profound to be communicated to any except the initiated." Bruce M. Metzger, *An Introduction to the Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford University, 1957), 5. Thus, the Apocryphal writings cannot be traced to an identifiable human author(s), nor is there concrete evidence of this literature being promulgated from within God's covenant people. Lee Martin McDonald further punctuates these traits representative of the Old and New Testament Apocryphal documents. Lee Martin McDonald, *Forgotten Scriptures: The Selection and Rejection of Early Religious Writings* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 227n.

[99] By applying an internal critique to the authorship, transmission, and preservation of the sixty-six-book canon of Scripture, Christian readers should have *objective confidence* that their ultimate authority for doctrine and practice can withstand the highest degree of scrutiny. On this note, Frederic G. Kenyon's words are conducive to ponder while reflecting on the intricacies of how the Bible was composed, and what the Bible teaches from start to finish: "It is reassuring at the end to find that the general result of all these discoveries and all this study is to strengthen the proof of the authenticity of the Scriptures, and our conviction that we have in our hands, in substantial integrity, the veritable Word of God." Frederic G. Kenyon, *The Story of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1967), 113.

what they believe and why they believe what they believe.[100] Since the Bible is a trustworthy historical document, all readers have an objective basis for surrendering to its covenantal revelation. Therefore, the focus for the remainder of this chapter will shift to unpacking how God's covenantal revelation in history organically culminated in normative canonical literature for his people.[101]

The Connection between God's Covenantal Revelation and the Biblical Canon

God's eternal decree is perhaps the most rudimentary connection between his covenantal revelation to man and the biblical canon.[102] Since the doctrine of God lies at the heart of all biblical and theological investigation, Christian convictions about the biblical canon must be consistent with the nature, character, and purposes of the Most High.[103]

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[100] The bulk of argumentation elaborated within this thesis is conducted from a Particular Baptist theological framework (i.e., "1689 Federalism"). However, much of what is stated throughout this chap. is directly applicable and profitable to Protestant Christians across multi-denominational lines. After all, works like H. Leon McBeth's *The Baptist Heritage* have persuasively illustrated how the Particular Baptist tradition is one of many historical expressions of Protestantism. H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 19–63.

[101] The remainder of this chapter describes how the eventual recording of written, objective, authoritative, and universally obtainable documents was the divinely ordained *telos* of God's covenantal revelation. That is to say, the canon of Scripture was not *merely* a historical phenomenon constructed by religious men. Ultimately, the sixty-six book canon of Scripture was a reality grounded in the triune God's eternal decree, and its progressive development was in perfect accord with his revelatory purposes throughout human history. For recent treatments of the aforementioned realities, see Andreas J. Köstenberger and Greg Goswell, *Biblical Theology: A Canonical, Thematic, and Ethical Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 149–50; Andreas J. Köstenberger and Michael J. Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy: How Contemporary Culture's Fascination with Diversity Has Reshaped Our Understanding of Early Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 109–22.

[102] God's sovereign arrangement of covenantal revelation to man, and the ensuing biblical canon, is lucidly depicted by Meredith G. Kline: "In the international covenants the providential ordering of the God of the Bible had made available a model most serviceable for the documentary expression of biblical religion. In the case of the New Testament as in that of the Old Testament, acceptance of its own claims as to its primary divine authorship leads to recognition of its pervasively covenantal nature and purpose." Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997), 70–71.

[103] Historically, for confessionally Reformed and Particular Baptist Christians, the doctrine of God is paramount to informing one's convictions about any other tenet of theology. Cornelius Van Til opines on the centrality of theology proper to shaping one's doctrinal and apologetical commitments: "Naturally in the system of theology and in apologetics the doctrine of God is of fundamental importance. We must first ask what kind of a God Christianity believes in before we can really ask with intelligence

Given the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith's (1689) function in shaping the theological commitments espoused throughout this thesis, it is appropriate to consider how it unpacks Scripture's portrayal of God's decretive will.[104]

> From all eternity God decreed everything that occurs, without reference to anything outside himself. He did this by the perfectly wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably. Yet God did this in such a way that he is neither the author of sin nor has fellowship with any in their sin. This decree does not violate the will of the creature or take away the free working or contingency of second causes. On the contrary, these are established by God's decree. In this decree God's wisdom is displayed in directing all things, and his power and faithfulness are demonstrated in accomplishing his decree. God knows everything that could happen under any given conditions. However, his decree of anything is not based on foreseeing it in the future or foreseeing that it would occur under such conditions.[105]

According to the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689), God has immutably determined *everything* that would ever transpire in redemptive history (Exod 4:11; Isa 46:10; Rom 11:36; Eph 1:11; etc.). When viewed through the lens of the eternal decree, it follows that the canon of Scripture was ordained by God from before the

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whether such a God exists. The *what* precedes the *that*; the connotation precedes the denotation; at least the latter cannot be discussed intelligently without at once considering the former." Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint, 4th ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2008), 30. Van Til continues,

> Christianity offers the triune God, the absolute personality, containing all the attributes enumerated [in Scripture], as the God in whom we believe. This conception of God is the foundation of everything else that we hold dear. Unless we believe in this sort of God, it does us no good to be told that we may believe in some other sort of God, or in anything else. For us everything depends for its meaning upon this sort of God. Accordingly we are not interested to have anyone prove to us the existence of any other sort of God but this God. Any other sort of God is no God at all, and to prove that some other sort of God exists is, in effect, to prove that no God exists. (34)

[104] Much of this section in chap. 3 is derived and modified from a five-part series of blogs submitted for a Professional Doctoral Studies seminar at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The seminar was titled, "80343 Contemporary Perspectives on the Resurrection and the Canon of Scripture," and was taught by Timothy Paul Jones. Each of the blogs can be accessed online at Dewey Dovel, "Understanding the Origins, Development, and Trustworthiness of the New Testament Canon," Covenant Confessions, August 30, 2021, https://covenantconfessions.com/understanding-the-origins-development-and-trustworthiness-of-the-new-testament-canon-part-5/. Additionally, as developed up to this point in this chapter—and as explicitly noted in footnote 13—all references to "canon" have in mind the sixty-six book compilation embraced throughout Protestantism.

[105] The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith in Modern English, "Chapter 3-God's Decree," Founders Ministries, July 23, 2023, https://founders.org/library/chapter-3-gods-decree/, paras. 1–2. For the benefit of the reader, an abundance of biblical citations are provided along with this online doctrinal statement.

foundation of the world (Ps 119:89; 1 Pet 2:23–25).[106] If Christians embrace the biblical reality about God's eternal decree, then they must likewise come to the realization that *every* Old and New Testament book exists by divine appointment.[107] Therefore, affirming the interrelatedness between God's covenantal revelation and the biblical canon begins with a proper cognizance of the divine decree; this connection extends into the unsearchable depths of eternity within the very being of God himself (Ps 2:7–9; John 17:4–8).[108]

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[106] Playing devil's advocate, Charles E. Hill notes that arguments suggesting the New Testament was formed as a result of political forces cannot be divorced from God's sovereign prerogatives. The quote documented below is likewise valid when musing on the Old Testament's construction throughout history:

> If the books of [the Bible] were assembled by hook and by crook, the books were still assembled, and God, according to Christian theology, was not left out of the process. In fact, as the biblical patriarch Joseph told his brothers who had sold him into slavery and abandoned him, "You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Gen. 50:20). If this culturally useful narrative about the formation of the Bible turns out to be accurate, the Christian can still look gratefully and joyfully at the saving message preserved in [the Bible] and say, "[Political forces] may have meant it for evil, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should hear the life-giving voice [of the biblical books]. (Charles E. Hill, *Who Chose the Books of the New Testament?*, ed. D. A. Carson (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2022), 8–9).

[107] Kruger argues for an "ontological definition" of canon in *The Question of Canon*, 40–45. According to Kruger, the *ontological definition* of canon "focuses on what the canon is in and of itself, namely the *authoritative books that God gave his corporate church*" (40, emphasis original). Kruger goes on to say,

> The limits [of the New Testament canon] are determined by the purpose for which they were given, apart from the actions of the church. [Since] God really gave certain books to serve as a permanent guide for the church—as the ontological definition maintains—then there is nothing incoherent about arguing that those limits are already there *in principle*. The "canon" is always the books God intended as a permanent foundation for his church; no more and no less. In this sense, the canon is "closed" as soon as the last book is given by God. (40n53)

If one takes Kruger's "ontological definition" of canon to its logical conclusion, then it is appropriate and accurate to regard the biblical canon as an eternally established reality in the mind of God. Despite the Old and New Testament writings not *formally* coming into existence until their authorship in real time, God eternally solidified every parameter associated with their eventual formation in redemptive history. In an analogous way, the same can be said about the salvation of God's elect. Although God's elect are not justified (declared righteous) in the sight of God until the moment they come to saving faith in history, God has nevertheless set his redeeming love upon them from eternity past. As such, from before the foundation of the world, God has ordained the end (salvation) and every means that would ultimately accomplish that end at the appointed time. Kruger's argument appears to accentuate the interrelatedness between how God's eternal decree—and providence—work to eventually enable the Old and New Testament writings to come into being, and be preserved for believers until the Last Day (i.e., the return of Jesus Christ).

[108] Once again, Kruger is helpful in acknowledging the implications associated with God's immutable decree in eternity past, absolute sovereignty in human history, and the guaranteed formation of

The umbrella of God's decree in eternity past makes the intersection between covenantal revelation and the completed canon of Scripture even clearer when surveying the corpus of redemptive history.[109] At bottom, the eternal decree accounts for, at least, (1) when biblical books originated throughout history, and (2) why certain literary works were excluded from the canon of Scripture.[110] From the standpoint of timing Scripture's progressive development in relationship to the divine-human covenants that were inaugurated throughout history, consider the following overview:[111]

Genesis 1–2: The establishment of the Covenant of Works.

Old and New Testament records: "Books do not *become* canonical—they are canonical because they are books God has given as a permanent guide for his church." Kruger, *The Question of Canon*, 40.

[109] On pp. 84–104 of this thesis extensive detail is allocated toward unpacking *how* the Old and New Testaments were formed. Moreover, pp. 104–7 of the thesis explores the basis for Protestants rejecting the Old and New Testament Apocryphal writings as inspired Scripture. The purpose for devoting such extensive attention to these historical factors related to canonicity is to establish epistemological justification for seeing Protestant conceptions of the Bible as the written Word of God. Nonetheless, the data espoused across the aforementioned pages largely focuses on the *how* of canon; namely, how did the biblical canon originate throughout history? In the survey that follows for the remainder of this chap., the *why* of canon will receive consideration; namely, *why* did canonical documents appear at all?

[110] Kruger's chapter in *Studies on the Intersection of Text, Paratext, and Reception* focuses on the intertextual basis for an Old/New Testament distinction within the biblical canon. A noteworthy observation advanced by Kruger is his association of the Old and New Testament documents to the prophetic (Old Testament) and apostolic (New Testament) witnesses. In other words, for Kruger, Old and New Testament literature was inextricably bound to specific authors that God raised up to pen his inspired, canonical documents. Although the antecedent link will be further perused in chap. 4 of the thesis, Kruger's contention is relevant here: God's providence in raising up the biblical authors is coterminous with God's providence in leading them to manufacture the autographs that would comprise the Old and New Testament. Michael J. Kruger, "Second Peter 3:2, the Apostolate, and a Bi-Covenantal Canon," in *Studies on the Intersection of Text, Paratext, and Reception: A Festschrift in Honor of Charles E. Hill*, ed. Gregory R. Lanier and J. Nicholas Reid (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 201–31.

[111] Although by no means exhaustive of how canonical Scripture developed in relationship to the divine-human covenants that were formulated throughout history, this list serves as a baseline flyover assessment. Furthermore, this list demonstrates Jeffrey Niehaus observation that "God's behavior, according to the Bible, is always covenantal—that is, God has always chosen to relate to humanity through various covenants he has ordained. . . . It is also true that the whole Bible is a product of the covenantal relationships God has instituted among humans. Since that is the case, the whole Bible may be called covenantal literature." Jeffrey Niehaus, *The Common Grace Covenants*, vol. 1 of *Biblical Theology* (Wooster, OH: Weaver, 2014), 2. When considered holistically, the divine-human covenants inaugurated in human history culminated in canonical literature. This canonical literature not only explains and preserves the testimony of the divine-human covenants that were formulated, but it is also normative for the people to whom it was given. Stated differently, the people with whom God enters into covenant are bound by the stipulations transcribed in the attesting canonical literature made available up to that period in redemptive history.

Genesis 3: The Covenant of Works is broken and the Covenant of Grace is promised.[112]

Genesis 3–Revelation 20: Fallen man is under the curse of the Covenant of Works in Adam.

Genesis 6–8: The historical background to the Noahic Covenant.

Genesis 9: The Noahic Covenant is established.

Genesis 10–Revelation 20: The Noahic Covenant is in effect.

Genesis 12–22: The Abrahamic Covenant is established.

Genesis 12–Revelation 22: The Abrahamic Covenant is in effect.[113]

Exodus 3–19: The historical background to the Mosaic Covenant.

Exodus 20–24: The Mosaic Covenant is established.

Exodus 25–Matthew 26 (and Gospel parallels): The Mosaic Covenant is in effect.

1 Samuel–2 Samuel: The historical background to the Davidic Covenant.

2 Samuel 7: The Davidic Covenant is established.

2 Samuel 7–Revelation 22: The Davidic Covenant is in effect.[114]

Matthew 1–25 (and Gospel parallels): The historical background to the New Covenant.

Matthew 26–28 (and Gospel parallels): The New Covenant is established in Jesus Christ's blood.

Matthew 28 (and Gospel parallels)–Revelation 22: The New Covenant is in effect.

While by no means perfect or exhaustive, the preceding canvass helpfully expresses how God's eternal decree undergirds *to whom* the biblical books were applicable for in real time, and *how* the biblical books are bound to every divine-human covenant

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[112] On pp. 72–75 of the thesis, the Covenant of Grace was identified as the New Covenant. Therefore, when both of these designations are used in the list associated with this footnote, they are to be interpreted as referring to the same concept.

[113] In chap. 2 of this thesis (pp. 59–63), it was argued that the physical dimension of the Abrahamic Covenant was fulfilled under the Mosaic Covenant, but the spiritual dimension of the Abrahamic Covenant is fulfilled through the salvation of the elect throughout history (cf. Gal 4:21–31).

[114] As alluded to in the preceding footnote, it is important to note that the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants remain in effect insofar they are fulfilled in the New Covenant (i.e., with regard to their ongoing spiritual application in Christ).

established in redemptive history (with the exception of the Davidic Covenant).[115] Indeed, a robust awareness of God's eternal decree will yield an accurate understanding of how the biblical covenants and the biblical canon intersect in real time.[116] When faced with questions centering on what one should make of the non-canonical literature that was either written by biblical authors or by their contemporaries, the lens of God's eternal decree provides the most cogent answers.[117]

In light of his sovereignty over the entire created order (Ps 115:3; 1 Tim 6:15–16), it must be affirmed that God providentially orchestrated *who* would pen canonical Scripture, and *what literature* would become canonical Scripture.[118] Thus, the canonical literature produced throughout redemptive history would originate from the pen of

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[115] Gregory Goswell, "The Two Testaments as Covenant Documents," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 62, no. 4 (2019): 677–92.

[116] Meredith G. Kline incisively unpacks how the biblical covenants and the biblical canon are indissolubly linked together, flowing organically from God's eternal decree: "The timing of the birth of the Bible was precisely conditioned [by God]; there were definite historical prerequisites for its appearance. If the Scriptural form of revelation was to be what it is—God's covenant addressed to the kingdom of his earthly people—then the Bible could have come into existence only when it did." Meredith G. Kline "Canon and Covenant," *Westminster Theological Journal* 32, no. 1 (November 1969): 45. Kline also writes,

> The relationship established by God with his people and progressively unfolded towards a predestined consummation as portrayed in Scripture is an eternal covenant relationship. This covenant order, however, is subject to the Lord Yahweh, who according to his sovereign purposes directs and forwards redemption's eschatological development by decisive interventions, initiating distinctive new eras and authoritatively redefining the mode of his kingdom. These advances and renewals with their alterations of previous arrangements are certified in the continuing Scriptural documentation of the covenant. (60)

[117] Consider a sampling of questions related to how canonical and non-canonical literature should be perceived in relationship to one another: Why does the Old Testament canon have the account of Solomon's life recorded in 1 Kgs, but not what can be found in the book of the Acts of Solomon? Why are 1–2 Cor in the New Testament canon, but not the apostle Paul's other correspondence to this first century church (e.g., 1 Cor 5:9; 2 Cor 2:3–4; 7:8–9)?

[118] Petrus van Mastricht's showcases awareness of God's sovereign hand in appointing the authors of canonical Scripture, and what would eventually become canonical Scripture:

> [Scripture's] origin, upon which its authority is built, first may be considered with respect to its amanuenses (whom Gregory in this regard calls "the hands of the Holy Spirit" in his *Preface on Job*). These were holy men of God (2 Pet. 1:21), the prophets and apostles. . . . [The Canonization of Scripture], moreover, is the process whereby the things written by inspiration were delivered to the church (Deut. 31:9; Ps. 147:19; Rom. 3:2) and sealed (Rev. 22:18–19). (Petrus van Mastricht, "Holy Scripture," in *Prolegomena*, vol. 1 of *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Todd M. Rester [Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2018], 125–26)

divinely appointed authors who were raised up to bear witness to the newly dispensed special revelation.[119] By virtue of their calling—usually as a prophet or an apostle—these individuals would compose writings that were inspired by the Holy Spirit.[120] However, this did not guarantee that *everything* written by such figures would eventually attain canonicity.[121] On the contrary, throughout the centuries pertaining to the Old and New Testament's development, the people of God were exposed to three distinct categories of religious writings: (1) inspired texts that would become canonical; (2) inspired texts that

[119] Robin Routledge delves into an analysis of the interrelationship between God raising up appointed authors to compose what would become canonical Scripture—and the organic production of his written special revelation. Robin Routledge, *Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012), 73–80. Routledge highlights how God transcends—yet superintends—the linear chain of progression from ordaining a human author of Scripture, to the revelation of himself through the autographs of that human author, to the production of canonical literature to be disseminated amongst the covenant community of faith (76). Although Routledge's work has a narrow focus on written special revelation found in the Old Testament, these principles are equally relevant to written special revelation found in the New Testament.

[120] John M. Frame notes that aside from "a few exceptions, the divine voice speaks to prophets and apostles, who present [God's] word to people orally and by writing." John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 543. Later in the work, Frame highlights how these prophets and apostles were divinely anointed agents utilized to bring forth what would become the inspired and canonical Scriptures (562–93). These crucial observations from Frame signify that insofar God continues to inaugurate redemptive-historical covenants, his people should expect the latest covenantal revelation to culminate in new canonical (i.e., Holy Spirit inspired) documents. Why? Because the formulation of canonical literature throughout redemptive history would organically stem from the pen of the authors who God raised up in a specific covenant epoch; the God-ordained authors would define, shape, and bear witness to the God-inaugurated covenants. Thus, there is an interwovenness between one's commissioning into the prophetic/apostolic office, and the ensuing production of Holy Spirit inspired literature to comprise the biblical canon. Canonical documents are produced inasmuch as (1) God enacts additional covenant epochs in redemptive history and (2) divinely appointed authors bear witness to the special revelation that God was pleased to dispense during the latest covenant epoch. At bottom, if God ceases to inaugurate new redemptive-historical covenants, then additional canonical literature should not be expected in the future. Although mentioned sparingly throughout chap. 3 of the thesis, a more elaborate treatment on this matter is reserved for chap. 4.

[121] The following excerpt from Williams Ames is quoted by van Mastricht: "For if any book is written by some extraordinary servant of God or by the certain direction of the Spirit, this is still insufficient to constitute it part of Scripture unless it is also given by divine authority to the church, and sanctified for this purpose: so that it might be its canon or rule." Van Mastricht, "Holy Scripture," 126. Van Mastricht's observations derived from Ames confirm that not everything penned by a Holy Spirit inspired author was guaranteed to make it into the canon of Scripture. Additionally, in accordance with the sovereign prerogatives of God, it was possible for a biblical author to have some of their inspired writings in the canon of Scripture, while others were excluded from the canon of Scripture.

would not become canonical; and (3) non-inspired texts that would not become canonical.[122]

Although God has used literature in each antecedent classification for particular purposes at particular times throughout redemptive history, only literature in the first category has been preserved to continually edify God's people until the present day.[123] While Christian and non-Christian scholars have advanced an abundance of historical hypotheses to account for this observation, the contention of this thesis is that God's eternal decree remains the most satisfactory explanation for the biblical canon's sixty-six-book

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[122] Greg L. Bahnsen carefully navigates how a distinction must be made between divine revelation dispensed through human writings, and the writings that would come to embody the biblical canon. In doing so, Bahnsen solidifies the grounds for affirming three distinct categories of religious writings that were available throughout Old and New Testament history:

> In order for a book to be accounted as canonical, it is necessary that it be inspired. However, while inspiration is a necessary condition for canonicity, it is not a sufficient one. Otherwise all of God's special (verbal) revelation would constitute the canon of the church; yet this is not the case, as we can see for a couple of reasons. First, remember that not all special revelation was given in written form or subsequently committed to writing (e.g., many discourses by Jesus while on earth, John 21:25; private revelations to the apostles, 2 Cor. 12:4, 7; Rev. 10:4; unpublished messages from New Testament prophets, 1 Cor. 12:28). Second, we must note that not all of those inspired messages which were reduced to writing have been preserved by God's providence for use by His people though history, such as "The Wars of Jehovah," "The Book of Jasher," Paul's previous letter to the Corinthians, etc. (c.f., Num. 21:14; Josh. 10:13; 2 Chron. 9:29; 12:15; 1 Cor. 5:9; 2 Cor. 2:4; 7:8). Therefore, we should say more precisely that the canon of the Christian church is constituted by those inspired writings which God has preserved for His people in all subsequent ages. (Greg L. Bahnsen, "The Concept and Importance of Canonicity," *Antithesis* 1, no. 5 [1990]: 6)

Thus, in keeping with Bahnsen's musings, there are (1) inspired texts that would become canonical (as penned by biblical authors in Old/New Testament history); (2) inspired texts that would not become canonical (as penned by biblical authors or non-biblical authors under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in Old/New Testament history); and (3) non-inspired texts that would not become canonical (as penned by non-biblical authors in Old/New Testament history).

[123] James R. White gets to the heart of the threefold distinction of literature that was being manufactured throughout Old and New Testament history: "The canon exists because God has inspired *some* writings, not *all* writings." James R. White, *Scripture Alone* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 2004), 101. White continues, "From a biblical perspective of God's sovereignty, the idea of 'lost Scripture' (i.e., writings that should be canonical but are not) is an unambiguously self-refuting concept" (110). From White's vantage point, there are inspired writings that comprise the canon of Scripture, and other writings that are outside of the biblical canon. From the perspective advocated in this thesis, writings outside of the sixty-six book canon of Scripture can conceivably be inspired by God or not inspired by God. Nevertheless, such books marked by these latter designations were never part of what the triune God eternally decreed to concretize the canon.

constitution.[124] Also, in accordance with God's eternal decree and infinite wisdom, all canonical Scripture that has been preserved for millennia serves as an all-sufficient witness to his covenantal dealings with man throughout redemptive history.[125] Therefore, as the covenant documents attesting to divine-human relations from creation to consummation, only the sixty-six-book canon of Scripture should function as the normative and ultimate authority for New Covenant followers of Jesus Christ.[126]

Conclusion

By investigating how the Old and New Testaments were formed, in addition to exploring how the biblical canon connects with God's covenantal revelation, Scripture's viability as the ultimate authority for Christianity was established in this chapter. Whether viewed through the lens of its historical development or theological distinctives, there are objective grounds for revering the Bible as the written word of God. Inasmuch as the sixty-

[124] Charles E. Hill cites a plethora of biblical scholars to exemplify how frequently the biblical canon is explicated from a purely historical lens in "The New Testament Canon: *Deconstructio Ad Absurdum*?," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52, no. 1 (March 2009): 101–19. Contrary to such methodologies, Hill notes the impossibility to engage in purely neutral historiography and suggests it should not be the desire of Christian scholars to do so in the first place (101–4). Operating from the aforesaid foundation, Hill embarks upon a sophisticated argument for championing God's sovereign hand in producing what would become the sixty-six book canon of Scripture (105–13). According to Hill, despite the biblical canon requiring concentrated historical inquiries, it is not *solely* a historical endeavor; rather, the issue of canon is an inescapably theological enterprise (113–19).

[125] Due to the entwined relationship between the biblical canon and God's covenantal relations to man, it necessarily follows that Scripture is perfectly sufficient for setting forth the details of divine-human covenants. Jason S. DeRouchie argues a similar point:

> The concept of covenant correlates closely with that of canon, for the latter is by nature the authoritative written word of a covenant lord. The Bible grew up in the context of covenant and is, therefore, canonical revelation. This fact led the early church fathers to designate the Bible's two parts as *Testaments* (i.e., "covenants"), with the Mosaic (old) covenant and the new covenant respectively dominating the first and second. A development of the covenants guides the biblical storyline. (Jason S. DeRouchie, "An Arc of the Covenants: Tracing How the Bible's Storyline Climaxes in Christ," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 26, no. 1 [2022]: 10)

[126] For a reminder of how the term *normative* is being defined in this thesis, see the overview provided on p. 2. Moreover, for a review of how chap. 3 opened by asserting the chief importance of an *ultimate authority* for justifying one's beliefs about reality, see pp. 78–82. As demonstrated throughout this portion of the thesis, both concepts are integral to educating Christians on how the Bible should impact their view of divine-human relations through covenant and how they should function in the world as God's people.

six-book canon of Scripture encapsulates the written word of God, the reader can thereby possess epistemological justification about the truthfulness of God's covenantal revelation contained therein. As God's trustworthy special revelation that defines, shapes, and attests to his covenantal relations to man, the Bible must be seen as normative for followers of Jesus Christ under the New Covenant. Yet, what should one make of claims suggesting that God continues to provide special revelation in the New Covenant epoch of redemptive history? Do such notions imply that the biblical canon remains open, and that God is still providing normative post-apostolic revelation to his people? Upon building off the foundation laid in chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis, these important queries will be discussed in chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

A NEW COVENANT APOLOGETIC FOR THE CESSATION OF NORMATIVE POST-APOSTOLIC REVELATION

In twenty-first century Western thought, opinions germane to the relationship between God and man can be found across a wide spectrum.[1] For those near the atheistic extreme, there is no God to whom man can relate because there is simply not enough evidence to warrant belief in God.[2] When asked to support the atheist's religious reluctance, one could cite the multitude of competing conceptions about God and the plethora of people around the globe who do not think God exists.[3] On the other hand, for those near the New Age extreme, peculiar religious feelings are often interpreted as

[1] As depicted in his highly esteemed treatise, *The Passion of the Western Mind*, Richard Tarnas elucidates modern and postmodern philosophical contours pertaining to the God-man relationship. The latter portion of part 5 (on the modern worldview) and the bulk of part 6 (on the transformation of the modern era) within Tarnas's volume are most conducive to engaging with Western thoughts on how God relates to man. Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World View* (New York: Ballantine, 1993), 282–410.

[2] Atheism, or the religious belief system that professes there is no God or gods, claims that the issue of "divine hiddenness" seems to indicate the legitimacy of denying the existence of supernatural entities. Travis Dumsday clarifyingly summarizes the notion of "divine hiddenness": "Along with the problem of evil, the problem of divine hiddenness has become one of the most prominent arguments for atheism in contemporary philosophies of religion. Roughly it is this: if there is a loving God, surely he would make his existence apparent to us, and in a way that we could not rationally doubt." Travis Dumsday, "C. S. Lewis on the Problem of Divine Hiddenness," *Anglican Theological Review* 97, no. 1 (Winter 2015): 33. In supplementation to Dumsday's work, Ken Ham and Bodie Hodge co-author a quality worldview introduction on atheism. Ken Ham and Bodie Hodge, "Atheism," in *Atheistic and Humanistic Religions*, vol. 3 of *World Religions and Cults*, ed. Bodie Hodge and Roger Patterson (Green Forest, AR: Master, 2016), 29–43.

[3] Luke Teeninga collates numerous popular and academic level resources that cite "divine hiddenness" as a prevailing reason for the prominence of atheism in Western thought. Of the noteworthy authors mentioned, J. L. Schellenberg (1959–) perhaps stands apart as the most vocal endorser of "divine hiddenness." See Luke Teeninga, "Divine Hiddenness Argument Against God's Existence," Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed October 27, 2023, https://iep.utm.edu/divine-hiddenness-argument-against-gods-existence/.

subjective revelation from the Divine.[4] If pressed to justify their convictions, adherents to forms of New Age religion can recount myriads of stories attesting to their spiritual transformation experience.[5] And like the atheist, New Age proponents will regard their understanding of the God-man relationship with equal validity.[6]

Herein lies at least one inescapable common denominator between all worldviews: the effort to formulate a reasonable explanation and defense (i.e., apologetic) about what one believes and why.[7] Despite being irreconcilable with one another, champions of atheistic and New Age viewpoints will strive to substantiate why their viewpoint of the God-man relationship is more satisfactory than other alternatives.[8] The

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[4] Ron Rhodes accentuates the subjective (and arbitrary) nature of New Age religious experiences:

> New Agers are typically relativistic in their view of truth and ethics. One New Age curriculum that found its way into some school districts in the United States taught students how to discover *their own* values. The idea in this curriculum is that values are not to be imposed from without (such as from Scripture or from parents) but must be *discovered within*. The underlying assumption is that there are no absolute truths or values. New Agers are well known for their view that "you can have your truth and I can have my truth," and that "your truth should never infringe upon my truth." And yet, it is interesting that they are willing to impose (infringe) this alleged absolute truth upon everyone! (Ron Rhodes, "The New Age Movement (Pantheism and Monism)," in *Moralistic, Mythical, and Mysticism Religions*, vol. 2 of *World Religions and Cults*, ed. Bodie Hodge and Roger Patterson [Green Forest, AR: Master, 2016], 25)

[5] Diego Perez's (pen name: Yung Pueblo) bestselling trilogy on New Age spirituality bears witness to the seismic influence that this specific ideology has made on Western citizens. For further review, the chronological order of the aforesaid works produced by Perez are Yung Pueblo, *Inward* (Kansas City, MO: Andrews McMeel, 2018); *Clarity & Connection* (Kansas City, MO: Andrews McMeel, 2021); *The Way Forward* (Kansas City, MO: Andrews McMeel, 2023).

[6] Ironically, the relativistic nature of New Age spirituality necessitates its affirmation that the atheistic (i.e., godless) worldview is equally valid to their understanding of religious experience. For the consistent New Age representative, their conception of the God-man relationship and the atheistic perspective on the God-man relationship are equally valid despite being inherently contradictory. Pat Collins peruses some of these idiosyncrasies throughout his article "New Age Spirituality," *Furrow* 49, no. 2 (1998): 91–97.

[7] Although it mostly pertains to the task of defending the Christian faith against objections, Wayne Grudem notes that the concept of apologetics (e.g., ἀπολογία; 1 Pet 3:15) can apply more broadly to the act of "replying to an accusation." Thus, when adherents to any given worldview offer a reasoned defense, explanation, or justification for their beliefs, they are functioning in an apologetic capacity. See Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 17 (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 161.

[8] Although some apprehensions of how God and man relate to one another are more nuanced and more sophisticated than others, every worldview will make an effort to map out this relationship to

same can be said in reference to any other system of religion, in addition to particular subsets that may exist under the broader umbrella of a given faith.[9] A relevant case study of the antecedent observation appears in various denominations of Protestant Christianity, wherein clergy and laity consider whether God continues to provide man with normative post-apostolic revelation.[10]

While such disputations are by no means a test of orthodoxy, they do convey significant practical and theological implications for how believers understand God's relationship to man in the New Covenant epoch of redemptive history.[11] If God no longer provides normative post-apostolic revelation to mankind, then believers have no rationale to anticipate receiving any propositional insights from the Most High apart from what is

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some extent *because* few things are more important for man than to make sense of how he relates to his Creator. J. H. Bavinck touches on this architectonic reality:

> We can indeed live *as though* there is a God or no God, *as though* there are norms or no norms, but ultimately we will want to know whether that great *as though* that we base our lives on can withstand the test of objective judgment. That is no game; it is not a hobby. It is alarming in its inevitability because otherwise, everything, our life itself, is a leap into the abyss. (J. H. Bavinck, *Personality & Worldview*, ed. and trans. James Eglinton [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023], 35).

[9] A simple example of how Christians can regard one another as brothers and sisters in Christ while differing on significant doctrinal distinctives is illustrated in the establishment of numerous denominational affiliations. Works that encapsulate recent attempts to catalogue the major peculiarities between theological traditions that reside within the broader arena of Christianity include Roger E. Olson, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*, 14th ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2018); Ron Rhodes, *The Complete Guide to Christian Denominations* (Eugene, OR: Harvest, 2015).

[10] For exposure to a written academic debate surrounding whether normative post-apostolic revelation is ongoing, see Wayne A. Grudem, ed., *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011). To watch a moderated debate on whether normative post-apostolic revelation is ongoing, see Michael L. Brown, Samuel E. Waldron, and James R. White, "Debate: Have the New Testament Charismatic Gifts Ceased?," Alpha & Omega Ministries, November 8, 2013, YouTube, 1:36:44, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NFpqVPhWt2Y. Additionally, the way in which the term *normative* is being defined throughout this thesis—in relationship to (post-apostolic) special revelation—can be found on p. 2.

[11] C. Peter Wagner insists that those who reject the notion of a second apostolic age—which features ongoing special revelation from God to man—are like the Pharisees who were resistant to the earthly ministry and teaching of Jesus Christ. This commentary is merely one of many examples that punctuate the vastly different practical and theological implications stemming from how one understands God's relationship to man in the post-apostolic era of church history. C. Peter Wagner, *The Changing Church: How God Is Leading His Church Into the Future* (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light, 2004), 17–18.

recorded in Scripture.[12] Conversely, if God is continuing to provide normative post-apostolic revelation to human beings, then Christians should yearn to acquire and obey that revelation to the same degree as the biblical canon.[13] Although vastly different experiential and intellectual arguments will be used to substantiate either of the preceding scenarios, in the final analysis, they are mutually exclusive ideologies; either God is (and presumably has been) dispensing normative post-apostolic revelation, or he is not (and has not).[14]

For the remainder of this chapter, a threefold approach will be employed to develop a New Covenant apologetic for the cessation of normative post-apostolic revelation, with the intention of building on the foregoing chapters in this thesis. First, an overarching survey of the Old and New Testaments will solidify the normative *nature* of

[12] The use of the term "propositional" is intentionally designed to differentiate God's revelation through the book of Scripture (i.e., special revelation recorded in the sixty-six-book biblical canon) from God's revelation through the book of nature (i.e., general revelation). While it is certainly true that the created order continually reveals God in manifold (non-salvific) ways, all general revelation is not propositional in nature (i.e., verbal). Therefore, insofar it can be demonstrated that the Bible is God's only preserved means of dispensing special revelation to man in the post-apostolic era of church history, it necessarily follows that human beings should not look elsewhere to encounter such revelation. For more insights on how the sixty-six-book Bible functions as the culmination of God's covenantal revelation to man, see chap. 3 of this thesis.

[13] Many individuals who purport the continuation of special revelation in the post-apostolic era of church history seek to argue that it is susceptible to error, and as a result, claim that it is not binding or normative for God's people. E.g., Bill Hamon, *Prophets and Personal Prophecy* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 1987), 176. However, as will be demonstrated later in this chapter, there is simply no biblical or theological basis for viewing God's special revelation to man as *anything other than normative*. By definition, any special revelation that comes from God is of a binding character to those whom it is intended for. R. Laird Harris summarizes the normative character of God's special revelation: "A prophet foretold events and forthtold truth because he spoke what God revealed to him. This was the continual claim of the Old Testament prophets and although there were false prophets who led the people astray and apostate people who did not regard the word of the Lord, yet by and large the prophets' messages were received by the faithful for what they were—God's authoritative word." R. Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969), 163.

[14] While it is outside the intended focus of this chapter to explicate the historical claims made for and against the cessation of normative post-apostolic revelation, it is necessary to note that scholars have formulated historical arguments to support both sides of the debate. For a sample of a work that suggests the testimony of church history supports the continuation of post-apostolic revelation, see Ronald Kydd, *Charismatic Gifts in the Early Church: The Gifts of the Spirit in the First 300 Years* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984). On the other hand, for a resource that insinuates the testimony of church history does not support the continuation of post-apostolic revelation, see Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Cessation of the Charismata* (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace, 2014). Given the contentions being set forth in this chapter of the thesis, I find the latter resource to be most compelling.

God's special revelation to man. Upon highlighting the normative nature of God's special revelation to his image bearers, attention will then be allocated to explore the normative *function* of apostles and prophets during the first century AD. Thereafter, an inquiry into the foundational role of the first century apostles and prophets will concretize why believers in subsequent generations of church history *should not expect* to receive additional normative revelation from God.

Recognizing the Normative Nature of God's Special Revelation to Man

A fundamental presupposition of Scripture is that when God speaks, man is *obligated* to obey.[15] The Bible presents no scenarios in which it is acceptable for man to disregard God's special revelation, or to perceive it as something other than normative for one's life.[16] When man disobeys God's Word, there is discipline for believers (Prov 3:12; Heb 12:5–8) and judgment for unbelievers (Ps 78:5–33; Rom 2:12–13).[17] When man

[15] Charles Hodge succinctly explicates the binding nature of God's commandments to humanity: "The Scriptures uniformly understand by law a manifestation of the will of God. All the operations of nature are ordered by laws of his appointment. And his will is represented as the ultimate foundation of moral obligation. . . . It is the standard of right and wrong . . . [and] is designed to bind the conscience and to regulate the conduct of men." Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 3:265–66.

[16] Tragically, many Christians in the twenty first century believe it is possible to receive special revelation from God, but not be bound to regard such special revelation as being equal with Scripture's normative authority. Wayne Grudem makes note of this contemporary trend:

> Most charismatic teachers today would agree that contemporary prophecy is not equal to Scripture in authority. Though some will speak of prophecy as being the "word of God" for today, there is almost uniform testimony from all sections of the charismatic movement that prophecy is imperfect and impure, and will contain elements that are not to be obeyed or trusted. For example, Bruce Yocum, the author of a widely used charismatic book on prophecy, writes, "Prophecy can be impure—our own thoughts or ideas can get mixed into the message we receive [from God]—whether we receive the words directly [from God] or only receive a sense of the message." (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000], 1055)

[17] When believers sin against God, he is faithful to do whatever it takes to draw them to repentance and preserve them in their faith (even to the point of taking their life; 1 Cor 11:28–32). On the other hand, although there can often be genuine temporal consequences for the sins committed by non-elect unbelievers, those temporal consequences are not used by God as a means of drawing them to repentance. The lack of being drawn to repentance by the Holy Spirit signifies a sinner residing under God's judgment, of which will be perfectly meted out on the Last Day (Rom 14:10; 2 Cor 5:10). When musing on these factors,

argues with God about what he has commanded them to do, the response from the Most High is marked by stern rebuke and sovereign redirection (Exod 4:1–17; Matt 16:21–23).[18] When man abandons God's expressed ethical standards, cultures and nations eventually undergo a decadent collapse (Gen 19:1–29; Rom 1:18–32).[19] At bottom, the triune God's expectation is that his image bearing creatures will heed the instruction that has been revealed to them (1 Sam 15:22; Luke 6:46–49).[20] Against the backdrop of how the Old and New Testaments portray man's accountability to divinely revealed

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John Gill makes poignant remarks in his commentary on Hebrews 12:8: "All that are chastised [for sin] are not children [of God], yet all that are children [of God] are chastised [for sin]." John Gill, "Hebrews 12:8—Bible Verse Meaning and Commentary," Bible Study Tools, accessed November 3, 2023, https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/hebrews-12-8.html.

[18] Whether imparted to man visually (i.e., through dreams, theophany, and/or visions), verbally (i.e., the direct audible voice of God or through a divinely appointed prophet), or in print (i.e., inscripturated) form, the Lord is faithful to steer his people in the direction they are to go; especially in the event where correction is needed. Herman Bavinck teases these connections out at greater length in *Guidebook for Instruction in the Christian Religion*, ed. and trans. Gregory Parker and Cameron Clausing (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2022), 28–31.

[19] Upon surveying the revolving cycle of human history, Bavinck offers an incisive analysis of the relationship between an eroding religious commitment (e.g., Christianity) and the decline of civilized society:

> History demonstrates that religion and morality are related, as Paul indicated in Romans 1:23. A low concept of the gods is always accompanied by low concepts of morality. It goes without saying: people who create and imagine a god for themselves who is cruel will be cruel themselves. People portray themselves in their gods. Monotheism has at least established the connection that what is good in the religious arena cannot be evil in the moral arena. The same God rules and legislates in both. Without metaphysics and religion, morality is rendered impossible, except in the form of utilitarianism. . . . A kingdom of humanness cannot exist without God. Psychologically, although there are two arenas in the human person, and although conscience and God-consciousness are not identical, nevertheless both exist within one and the same person. We connect our conscience (the law of the moral life) with our God-consciousness involuntarily and spontaneously; we identify the giver of the moral law with the supreme power of our innate ideas. (Herman Bavinck, *Created, Fallen, and Converted Humanity*, vol. 1 of *Reformed Ethics*, ed. John Bolt [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019], 72)

[20] As rightly noted by J. I. Packer, "when we read, or hear read or expounded, the biblical record of what God said in Old or New Testament times, we are as truly confronted by a word or revelation addressed by God to us, and demanding a response from us, as were the Jewish congregations who listened to Jeremiah or Ezekiel, or Peter, or Christ, or the Gentile congregations who listened to the sermons of the apostle Paul." J. I. Packer, *God's Words: Studies of Key Bible Themes* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 24.

ordinances, David T. King expounds the intrinsically normative nature of special revelation in *Holy Scripture: The Ground and Pillar of Our Faith (Volume I)*.[21]

> All revelation from God is authoritatively binding in nature and extends to the most minute detail disclosed because God is its author. If this is true of general revelation (Rom. 1:18ff), which makes all mankind culpable before God, though insufficient to reveal the way of salvation, then surely special revelation, which manifests divine truth with greater clarity and increased radiance, constrains us, in the language of Isaiah, to "listen diligently," and to incline our ears to hear that our souls may live (Is. 55:2–3). This is a sobering biblical principle which can only be ignored at the risk of our immortal souls (Lk. 12:48; Heb. 2:1–3, 10:26–29; 12:25).[22]

The pupil of Scripture will concur with King's assessment by tracing out the unfolding metanarrative from Genesis to Revelation.[23] At the inception of human existence, God provided man with a task to fulfill and a law to obey; the former was the commission for man to cultivate and subdue the earth (Gen 1:28–30), whereas the latter was to not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Gen 2:15–17).[24] Thus,

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[21] This principle of man's accountability to divinely revealed ordinances does not vitiate the reality that some divine ordinances were intended for a particular people comprising a particular time period in redemptive history. For example, New Covenant Christians are not bound to obey the ceremonial and civil statutes contained in the Old Covenant law because those statutes were narrowly intended to govern public and religious life in theocratic Israel; they were terminated with the inauguration of the New Covenant and the ensuing cessation of Israel as a theocratic nation (e.g., Heb 8:13). Herman Bavinck teases these distinctions out in his work, *The Duties of the Christian Life*, vol. 2 of *Reformed Ethics*, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 7–20.

[22] David T. King, *Holy Scripture: The Ground and Pillar of Our Faith* (Battle Ground, WA: Christian Resources, 2001), 1:42.

[23] From the earliest portions of the Bible, believers can apprehend the primacy of listening to God's spoken words and responding with humble receptivity. When viewed in conjunction with the unfolding metanarrative of special revelation, Craig G. Bartholomew provides a strikingly relevant example of how the people of God have always been called to emulate this behavior:

> A central text for both Jews and Christians is the [Shema] of Deuteronomy 6:4–9. In 6:3–4 the imperative . . . could well be translated as "Listen!," [and] it alerts the Israelites to the fundamental importance of *listening* to God's address mediated through Moses. This connects with the church's root metaphor for Scripture: it is God's Word/address, and the attitude of reception it calls for is *respectful listening*. In the light of the Shema, this is obvious: what alternative attitude would be more appropriate than a trembling, open receptivity [to God's spoken words]? (Craig G. Bartholomew, *Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Framework for Hearing God in Scripture* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015], 24)

[24] Cornelius Van Til accentuate the interrelatedness between man's cultural mandate and his responsibilities within the covenant of works:

there is an existential inseparability between man's existence as an image bearing creature and his calling to render personal, total, exact, and perpetual obedience to God.[25] Adam and Eve did not have the freedom or the right to tell their maker how they preferred to live in his world.[26] Instead, they were held accountable by their holy creator to live as he would have them to live, and to behave as he would have them to behave.[27] Even in a postlapsarian world, the precedent established in the Garden of Eden has continued to shape the relationship between God and man: the Creator establishes verbal or written

> Next to noting that man was created in God's image it must be observed that man was organically related to the universe about him. Man was to be prophet, priest, and king under God in this created world. The vicissitudes of the world would to a large extent depend upon the deeds of man. As a prophet man was to interpret this world after God, as a priest he was to dedicate this world to God, and as a king he was to rule over it for God. . . . Soon thereafter [man's creation in the image of God], he fell into sin. As a creature of God man had to live in accordance with the ordinances that God has placed in his creation. . . . God did communicate to man over and above what was embedded in his very nature the specific commandment not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But this was only to force an immediate and final test as to whether a man would really live in accordance with the law of God as everywhere revealed within and about him. (Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, ed. William Edgar, 2nd ed. [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003], 41–42)

[25] The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689) states that Adam and all of his descendants were obligated to render to God "personal, total, exact, and perpetual obedience." This has been, and will continue to be, the calling bestowed unto all humanity until the Last Day. As such, sinful man's need for the Gospel is all the more apparent when ascertaining his total inability to offer God what he requires. "Chapter 19—The Law of God," Founders Ministries, The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith in Modern English, accessed September 12, 2023, https://founders.org/library/chapter-19-the-law-of-god/.

[26] J. Gresham Machen emphasizes the binding nature of God's law on all human beings from Adam to the end of the age. In keeping with Machen's rhetoric throughout this section of his work, "God is [always] the lawgiver [and] man [is always] the subject; God [is always] the ruler [and] man [is always] the ruled." J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian View of Man* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1984), 188.

[27] John Frame nicely phrases his perspective on man's fundamental accountability to God:

> In Scripture, human beings are clearly responsible in the first sense, because they are accountable to God as the supreme evaluator of human conduct. Human responsibility in this sense, therefore, is a consequence of God's lordship attribute of authority. God has made us according to his plan and for his purpose. That purpose is to glorify him, to please him. The fundamental standard of human conduct is that we should reflect God's own nature. As he has made us in his image (Gen. 1:27–28), so we should behave in a way that images him: "Be holy," he says, "for I the LORD your God am holy" (Lev. 19:1; cf. 11:44; Matt. 5:48; 1 Pet. 1:15–16). God reveals the nature of holiness by his Word. It is that Word that definitively reveals human obligations and therefore what we would call human responsibilities. (John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013], 809)

commandments for his image bearers to obey, and the temporal outworking of their relationship is often tethered to how man adheres to the divine mandates.[28]

For example, a mere Google search will reveal various popular level resources that identify 613 commandments elucidated throughout the Old Testament, and several hundred commandments delineated in the New Testament.[29] While these measurables may not be *absolutely* precise, they categorically reveal that (1) there has never ceased to be divine stipulations for governing humanity's presence in this world and (2) God repeatedly requires man to obey what he says.[30] Therefore, whether directing man to his need for salvation (by divine grace alone through faith alone) or to greater degrees of sanctification,

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[28] Samuel E. Waldron's commentary on chap. 19 of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689) punctuates the inescapable connotations associated with God's commandments upon the human race:

> The obligation to obey [God's law] is an inherent and unavoidable part of all human existence. In other words the law binds men forever, whether justified or unjustified, simply because as creatures they owe such obedience to the Creator. The New Testament teaches very clearly that the Law binds unsaved persons (Matt. 19:16–22; Rom. 2:14–15, 19–20; 6:14; 7:6; 8:3; 1 Tim. 1:8–11). But it also teaches that the moral law, the Ten Commandments, also binds believers (Rom. 13:8–10; 1 Cor. 7:19; Gal. 5:6; 6:15; Eph. 4:25–6:4; James 2:11–12). (Samuel E. Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*, 5th ed. [Welwyn Garden City, UK: Evangelical, 2016], 284–85)

[29] Rough online estimates pertaining to the exact number of commandments in the Old and New Testaments can be found via these respective sources: "What Are the 613 Commandments in the Old Testament Law?," GotQuestions, accessed February 17, 2023, https://www.gotquestions.org/613-commandments.html; Myron Horst, "List of Commands in the New Testament," Biblical Research Reports, March 25, 2017, http://www.biblicalresearchreports.com/list-commands-new-testament/. While these numbers may not be perfectly accurate, they epitomize how God went to tremendous lengths for the purpose of instructing man in matters related to faith and life.

[30] Drawing from the affirmations contained in chap. 1 of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689), John Reuther's chapter devotes ample space to highlighting how God's Word has shaped humanity's creaturely existence from the very beginning. John Reuther, "Of the Holy Scriptures," in *A New Exposition of the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*, ed. Rob Ventura (Fearn Scotland: Mentor, 2022), 37–59. Additionally, Herman Ridderbos states God's intention for dispensing special revelation to his image bearers:

> The purpose and the nature of Scripture [i.e., special revelation] lie thus in that qualified sort of teaching and instruction which is able to make us wise to salvation, which gives to God's people this "completeness" and equips them for every good work. That we cannot speak about Scripture and its qualities apart from this scope, purpose, and nature, should also be the point of departure of every theological evaluation and definition of biblical authority. (Herman Ridderbos, *Studies in Scripture and Its Authority* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978], 23)

the extensiveness of God's commands underscore their intrinsically normative nature.[31] Even in cases where particular commandments were temporary in nature or intended for an exclusive audience (e.g., theocratic Israel), the general equity of such ordinances is retained for all time (Deut 29:29; Rom 15:4).[32] Insofar God has spoken, there will always

[31] The Law-Gospel distinction is architectonic to accurately interpreting and accurately applying God's Word. Rick Ritchie lucidly summarizes the Law-Gospel distinction in the following manner: "The law demands while the gospel gives. We need to know from the law what God demands of us before we recognize our need to be saved by the gospel." Rick Ritchie, "The Law According to Jesus," *Christ the Lord: The Reformation and Lordship Salvation*, ed. Michael S. Horton (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 72. Historically, Protestants have a rich heritage of recognizing the Law-Gospel distinction, in supplementation to how the Law (i.e., God's commandments) relates to man's responsibility in the world. When understood with reference to the moral commandments contained in Scripture (e.g., the Ten Commandments, miscellaneous New Testament imperatives, etc), theologians that were integral to the Protestant Reformation have noted three distinct uses of those commandments (or laws): (1) a civil use to restrain unregenerate and regenerate sinners from unrighteous living out of a fear of punishment; (2) a spiritual use to reveal unregenerate man's need for salvation from their sin committed against a holy God; and (3) a pedagogical use to direct believers in how they should live for the glory of God. John E. Witte Jr. and Thomas C. Arthur connect these dimensions of God's moral statutes to the thought of specific Reformers for the purpose of pondering their application to criminal punishment in their thought-provoking article, "The Three Uses of the Law: A Protestant Source of the Purposes of Criminal Punishment?," *Journal of Law and Religion* 10, no. 2 (1993): 433–65.

[32] In both the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689) and the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), para. 4 of chap. 19 utilizes the term "general equity" against the backdrop of Israel's civil, or judicial, laws. The citation from each of these Reformed confessions is included in the following:

> To [Israel] also [God] gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any now by virtue of that institution; their general equity only being of moral use. ("Chapter 19—Of the Law of God")
>
> To [Israel] also, as a body politick, [God] gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people, not obligating any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require. (G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith: For Study Classes* [Philadelphia: P & R, 1964], 141)

When used within the context of the aforementioned confessions of faith, the term *general equity* refers to abiding principles of justice that are morally applicable to God's people across covenantal epochs of redemptive history. In conjunction with citing Deut 22:1–2, 5, 8; 24:14–15; 25:4 in his exposition of chap. 19, John Reuther observes,

> Even though we are not obliged now by those civil laws, there are principles of general equity which remain as moral principles that apply to believers today. . . . All of these are legislations for the civil life of the nation of Israel. In their form, we are not required to keep them. But there is [an abiding] spirit or a principle and in [cases such as Deuteronomy 24:14–15 and Deuteronomy 25:4] the New Testament gives specific application. (John Reuther, *A New Exposition of the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689* [Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2022], 362–63)

Insofar Reuther is cogent in his reasoning, New Covenant Christians can wholeheartedly affirm that viable insights and moral applications can be gleaned from obsolete Old Covenant laws. For a further delineation of this subject, along with an overview of the historical context pertaining to the authorship of the Westminster Confession of Faith, see Harold G. Cunningham, "God's Law, 'General Equity' and the

be viable applications for man to ascertain (2 Tim 3:16–17; Heb 4:12–13).[33] Willem VanGemeren helpfully stresses the inextricable connection between God's authoritative special revelation and man's call to obedience in *The Progress of Redemption: The Story of Salvation from Creation to the New Jerusalem*[34]:

> [God's Word] requires continual submission of our understanding to what the Spirit of God has inspired (1 Cor. 2:12–15) and requires personal transformation, application, and alteration of our presuppositions. . . . One's prior understanding, however, must continually come under the transforming power of the Spirit of God, witnessing through the Word of God. Interpretation of the Bible requires submission of one's spirit to the Holy Spirit, a walk with God, a diligent study of the Word, and an openness to the insights of other believers. God speaks and we listen.[35]

Westminster Confession of Faith," *Tyndale Bulletin* 58, no. 2 (November 2007): 289–312. Additionally, an excellent and thorough treatment of the Law-Gospel distinction can be further explored in John Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel* (New York: Osborn & Buckingham, 1835), 129–214

[33] During his presidential address delivered at the 47th annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, George W. Knight III grappled with the Bible's timeless and universal relevance for God's people. As a compilation of divinely inspired documents, Knight perceived texts such as Rom 15:4, 1 Cor 10:1–6, and 2 Tim 3:16–17 to indicate that believers can *always* be shaped by the substance of the Old and New Testaments; even if portions therein were limited to a particular audience or to a narrow period of time. The following excerpt is a sampling of Knight's perspective on this matter:

> What is so remarkable and instructive about Paul's use of the Scriptures under the rubric of their having been written for our instruction is his understanding that they directly instruct us and apply to us. He writes as if there were no gap at all between the Scriptures written years before and the "us" for whom they are written as instruction. . . . Only when the redemptive work of Christ fulfills or abrogates the OT types and shadows (e.g., the ceremonial law and the Jewish theocratic entity), removes the condemning curse of the Law, and lays the nonrepeatable foundation for the NT church does Paul indicate that these aspects of the Scriptures have been thereby fulfilled, abrogated, or removed. But in no case does he write about conduct in the realm of morality and say or imply that the Scriptures were not in that case written for our instruction. (George W. Knight III, "The Scriptures Were Written for Our Instruction," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39, no. 1 [March 1996]: 12)

[34] In supplementation to VanGemeren's quotation included in the body of the text (see above), the ideas expressed in this excerpt are likewise conducive for the reader's perusal:

> The purpose of the revelatory Word of God is to prepare individuals to respond to that Word when it is addressed to them (Gen. 2:16–17). Throughout the Old Testament, God speaks to his people and creates his own people by his Word. The revelation to Abraham, Moses, and Israel was a Word revelation. The prophets spoke the Word of God. The Word became incarnate in Jesus Christ. He was full of grace and faithful love as he spoke and called on people to respond to the Father (John 1:1–14). The Bible witnesses that the God who spoke at creation continued to speak through Moses and the Prophets and, in a climactic way, through the Son. (Willem VanGemeren, *The Progress of Redemption: The Story of Salvation from Creation to the New Jerusalem* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000], 55)

[35] VanGemeren, *The Progress of Redemption*, 27–28.

This is the normative nature of God's special revelation to humanity. Nevertheless, for those residing in the New Covenant epoch of redemptive history, the recurring debate continues to center on *how* God speaks to image bearing creatures.[36] Does God continue to provide mankind with normative special revelation i*n addition* to what is contained in the sixty-six book Holy Bible?[37] Or, are the Old and New Testament Scriptures the *exclusive* source of God's normative special revelation until the return of Christ?[38] Prior to answering both of these paramount queries, space must first be directed toward evaluating the primary agents through which God dispensed his special revelation: prophets and apostles.[39]

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[36] As Vern S. Poythress makes abundantly clear, Bible believing Christians will universally agree on the fact that God speaks through creation and through Scripture (i.e., general and special revelation). Vern S. Poythress, *Redeeming Science: A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 33–41. However, there is ample debate on whether God speaks *outside* those sources of revelation in the post-apostolic era of church history. Chap. 4 of the thesis seeks to shed clarity on the broader contours of this debate and provide biblically derived arguments for the cessation of normative post-apostolic revelation.

[37] This chap. of the thesis operates from the assumption that the sixty-six-book Protestant Bible is the inspired Word of God that has been preserved throughout the New Covenant epoch of redemptive history. For more details pertaining to the basis of embracing these presuppositions, see "Reflecting on Old and New Testament Apocryphal Literature" in this thesis.

[38] The scope of this chap. focuses on the *post-apostolic* era of the New Covenant epoch. As previously noted in chap. 3, and as will be reiterated in this chap., I am well aware that there would have been normative special revelation given from God that was not written down or was not preserved in accordance with God's providence. In such cases, that special revelation was only normative for the immediate context who received it but was not normative for God's people in different geographical or temporal contexts. Otherwise, God would have sovereignly preserved that disclosure in the canon of Scripture, in addition to enabling it to be made available for believers beyond a confined geographical and/or temporal milieu. Nevertheless, one should not regard the Holy Bible as deficient or incomplete due to the absence of *all* special revelation that God has bestowed unto man. Since God can never contradict himself (2 Tim 2:13), any non-canonical special revelation that has ever been given by God remains consistent with what is transcribed in the sixty-six-book canon. Herein marks the sufficiency of Scripture, as confessed by Protestants for over five centuries. For a helpful reflection on the sufficiency of Scripture against the backdrop of normative non-canonical special revelation, see Richard B. Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost: Studies in New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1979), 99–102. For more on how the normativity of special revelation should be impacted and understood in light of varying contextual factors, see Vern S. Poythress, *Reading the Word of God in the Presence of God: A Handbook for Biblical Interpretation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 27–44, 85–128.

[39] In his exposition of the Sermon on the Mount, William Perkins discusses how the prophets and the apostles were the primary instruments whereby God communicated his special revelation to man (especially as transcribed in Scripture). Regarding the Old Testament, Perkins states, "All Scripture of the Old Testament is either *the law or the prophets*, that is, was either penned by Moses or by *some of the*

Recognizing the Normative Function of God's Prophets and Apostles

The normative *nature* of God's special revelation to man is further solidified by examining the normative *function* of his two primary spokesmen throughout biblical history.[40] On the basis of inspired Scripture, the written (canonical) culmination of God's covenantal revelation to man comes from messengers who produce the authoritative words of God himself.[41] In his presidential address delivered at the 71st meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Michael J. Kruger shed light on how the first century church would have perceived the Old and New Testaments in relationship to the prophetic and apostolic offices[42]:

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prophets, who were extraordinarily moved and enabled thereunto. And therefore all the books from Genesis to Malachi are canonical Scripture, because they are written by some of the prophets." William Perkins, *The Works of William Perkins*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, Derek W. H. Thomas, and J. Stephen Yuille (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2014), 1:643. Perkins continues these musings with respect to the New Testament by positing, "The apostles in speaking and writing were of equal authority with the prophets, having the infallible assistance of the Holy Ghost, as well as the prophets . . . the apostles are made equal with the prophets" (644). Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley likewise make a similar connection in *Man and Christ*, vol. 2 of *Reformed Systematic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 980.

[40] The *normative function* of prophets and apostles speak to the binding authority they embodied as God's appointed delegates. That is to say, when a prophet or an apostle supplied divine instruction pertaining to doctrine and/or practice, they did so with the same jurisdiction as the triune God. Tom Pennington makes similar observations:

> In His high priestly prayer, Jesus makes it clear that His mandate to the apostles was to communicate His word! They were to serve as His official proxies to His church. And their primary function was to take the word given to them by the Triune God and communicate it to His people. . . . Paul also says that New Testament prophets are part of the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20). . . . By definition, this argues that these prophets, like the Old Testament prophets, were men who spoke for God. Their words were direct revelation from God—they were the very words of God Himself. (Tom Pennington, *A Biblical Case for Cessationism: Why the Miraculous Gifts of the Spirit Have Ended* [Douglasville, GA: G3, 2023], 76–77)

[41] Michael J. Kruger provides an exegetical analysis of the following texts to, among other things, illuminate (1) the in-breaking of the New Covenant; (2) the provision of written documents attesting to the New Covenant; (3) how the New Covenant documents possess the same normative authority as the Old Covenant documents (the subsequent Scripture references are listed in the same chronology utilized by Kruger): Heb 1:1–2; 2:13; Rom 1:1; 1 Pet 1:10–12; Luke 11:49; 1 Tim 5:18; 1 Cor 9:9, 14; 2 Tim 4:13. Michael J. Kruger, "2 Peter 3:2: The Apostolate, and a Bi-Covenantal Canon," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 63, no. 1 (March 2020): 10–15.

[42] After perusing the Old and New Testament data, G. I. Williamson notes three distinct Old Testament offices and six explicit New Testament offices. The Old Testament offices that Williamson references were "prophet," "priest," and "king." G. I. Williamson, "A Look at the Biblical Offices," *Ordained Servant* 1, no. 2 (April 1992): 30. The New Testament offices were "apostle," "prophet," "evangelists,"

> In a remarkable fashion, [Peter] juxtaposes "prophets" and "apostles" as the two divinely sanctioned sources of revelation for the early Christian movement, thereby providing a theological rationale for a bi-covenantal canon. . . . Fundamental to this passage is that authoritative Christian revelation is found in a two-part source. There is little doubt that the "words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets" (τῶν προειρημένων ῥημάτων ὑπὸ τῶν ἁγίων προφητῶν) refers to OT writings either in part or in whole. Then our author mentions a second, parallel source of revelation, namely the "commandment of the Lord" (ἐντολῆς τοῦ κυρίου) spoken by "your apostles" (τῶν ἀποστόλων ὑμῶν). It is noteworthy that this two-part authority includes an obvious older half—"words spoken beforehand"—as well as an obvious newer half—the apostolically-mediated words of (about) Jesus. . . . [Peter] even proceeds to place Paul's letters alongside the "other Scriptures" (v. 16), a term normally reserved for OT books. Once again, we see that our author recognizes a two-fold source of revelation: apostolic writings (in this case, Paul's) and the "other Scriptures" (a clear reference to the OT). Both sources are Scripture.[43]

When considering Kruger's exegetical insights against the backdrop of how Peter was perceived in the early church, the normative function affixed to the prophetic and apostolic offices are persuasively accentuated.[44] In the days leading up to—and

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"elders," "deacons," and "believers" (31). Hence, the term "office" refers to a unique role of spiritual service to God's people. Williamson also notes that the offices of apostle and prophet were inspired and temporary roles for the New Covenant epoch of redemptive history (32).

[43] Kruger, "2 Peter 3:2," 7–8, 10.

[44] Whether viewed through a Protestant, Roman Catholic, or a secular lens, it is impossible to deny the influence that Simon Peter has had on the trajectory of human history over the past two millennia. John MacArthur articulates a Protestant viewpoint on Peter: "[Peter] stands out as the leader and spokesmen for the whole company of [the twelve disciples]." John MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men: How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness, and What He Wants to Do with You* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 29. B. K. Kuiper notes the Roman Catholic conception of Peter: "According to [Roman Catholic] tradition the church in Rome had been founded by the apostle Peter. To that apostle Christ had entrusted the keys, and it was claimed that Peter had transmitted the power of the keys to the bishops of Rome." B. K. Kuiper, *The Church in History* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964), 40–41. Markus Bockmuehl offers a secular (albeit, negative) portrayal of Peter's pervading influence on global expressions of Christianity:

> One still finds Peter popularly interpreted as an implicit legitimator of power—especially the power of a church historically prone to excesses of clericalism and privilege, but also to concordats or tacit collusions with oppressive regimes through the ages. This accusation that the Petrine office serves as a cover for unjustified or abusive assertions of power is by no means an innovation of the 21st century, but dates back to the second or even the first century. (Markus Bockmuehl, "Attitudes to Jewish and Roman Power in the *Gospel* and *Acts of Peter*," in *The Early Reception and Appropriation of the Apostle Peter (60–800 CE): The Anchors of the Fisherman*, ed. Roald Dijkstra [Leiden: Brill, 2020], 81–82)

At bottom, in light of the aforementioned samples, it should go without saying that the apostle Peter exuded a normative function in the life of the early church. If this can be said of Peter—who intentionally equates his office of apostle with the office of prophet in 2 Pet 3:2—then there is credible reason to believe it would have likewise been said of his apostolic contemporaries in the first century. Thus, the offices of prophet and

encapsulating—the first advent of Jesus Christ, believers revered the Old Testament prophets as chosen instruments of divine revelation.[45] Yet insofar Peter's words were taken seriously by Christians residing in the first century (they were), the apostles must likewise be regarded with the same measure of authority as the prophets.[46] Since both parties were God's appointed mouthpieces to speak and inscripturate his normative special revelation, they are to be equally identified as normative ambassadors for his kingdom.[47]

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apostle were characterized by a *normative function*; when they gave instruction, God's people were expected to heed such instruction.

[45] The overarching posture of reverence that God's people have modeled toward the prophets throughout biblical history is captured by J. Daniel Hays and Tremper Longman:

> Beginning in the Pentateuch, the role of the prophet is closely associated with delivering the word of God. . . . In the historical books, especially 1–2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings, several prophets play key roles in the biblical story (Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, Elisha). The role of the prophet takes on a special significance in times when the Israelite monarchy and Israelite priesthood turn away from God. . . . The prophets provide the primary link between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Indeed, much of the theology of the New Testament is built upon the prophets, and the New Testament is difficult to understand apart from the message they proclaimed. (J. Daniel Hays and Tremper Longman, *The Message of the Prophets: A Survey of the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017], 23–24, 30)

[46] Herman Bavinck repeatedly stress how Christ's apostles were equal in authority to—and equally revered as—every divinely appointed prophet that appears throughout the scope of biblical history. Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1956), 95–115. On the basis of Bavinck's observations from Scripture, there is no reason to doubt whether first-century Christians would have shared Peter's understanding of the apostolic-prophetic connection. Believers residing in the twenty-first century should readily subscribe to this same mentality.

[47] The culmination of the Old and New Testament literary assortment signifies the normative function of God's prophetic and apostolic ambassadors. Nicholas G. Piotrowski and Brady New explore this biblical-theological implication:

> The NT is, therefore, "all the truth" given by Jesus himself, the eschatological Deuteronomy 18 prophet. Equally, we are brought to say the same thing about the OT for two reasons: (1) it is verified and validated by Jesus' and the apostles' affirmation that it is the word of God. Such a view of the OT is part of "all the truth" in the NT. And (2) it is written by the very prophets that typologically anticipate Jesus' prophetic ministry. . . . Thus, as the collection of texts leading up to and deriving from Jesus, the OT and the NT together comprise the *voice* of the LORD that must be *heard* (Nicholas G. Piotrowski and Brady New, "'They Will Hear My Voice': A Biblical Theology of the Necessity and Sufficiency of Scripture," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 26, no. 2 [Spring 2022]: 22–23)

The normative function of the prophets and apostles is explored in the subsequent paragraphs of this chap.

To ascertain how this is the case, a closer look into the observable function of prophets and apostles is in order.[48]

Whether portrayed in the Old Testament or the New Testament, prophecy is the most common means employed by God to communicate with his people.[49] Although the first explicit identification of a prophet is not found until Genesis 20:7 (i.e., Abraham), the New Testament ascribes the designation of "prophet" to figures as early as Abel (Luke 11:50–51), and as late as the apostle John (Rev 1:3).[50] Prior to the redemptive historical in-breaking of the New Covenant, hundreds of men and women comprised the prophetic office.[51] While the vast majority of these Old Testament prophets are not explicitly

[48] On top of the literary works cited under this sub-heading, the following documentary proved to be an enlightening resource on the way Scripture pictures the function of apostles and Old/New Testament prophets: Les Lanphere, dir., *Cessationist* (Broken Stone Studio, 2023).

[49] In his quintessential treatise on pneumatology, Charles C. Ryrie not only delineates the close association between the dispensing of prophecy and the offices of apostle and prophet, but also notes how the byproduct of such prophecy was normative special revelation for God's people:

> The principal human instrument of revelation in the Old Testament was the prophet. Although the giving of revelation was not limited to the prophet (for example, it also came through such people as Eve, Cain, and Hagar), no one could qualify as a true prophet unless he had received revelation from God. In New Testament times, prophets, apostles, and those closely associated with them were the chief human agents of receiving and communicating revelation (1 Corinthians 14:1–6; Ephesians 2:20). However, behind the human writers was the divine author of revelation, the Holy Spirit. (Charles C. Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit* [Chicago: Moody, 1997], 43)

[50] Wayne Grudem, "Prophecy, Prophets," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander et al. (Leicester: InterVarsity, 2000), 701.

[51] Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 274–76. Grudem distinguishes between "established primary prophets," "secondary bands of prophets," and "women as prophets." In this context, Grudem cites the following women as prophets appearing throughout Old Testament history: Miriam (Exod 15:20); Deborah (Judg 4); Huldah (2 Kgs 22:14–20; 2 Chr 34:22–28); the wife of Isaiah (Isa 8:3). By solidifying these categories, Grudem rightly illustrates that there were significantly less women serving in the prophetic office than men. Moreover, Grudem also notes,

> Apart from Miriam's ministry in song and the song of Deborah and Barak, women prophets in the Old Testament ministered privately to individuals rather than publicly to large groups. . . . [Thus], the activity of women as prophets was distinct from the activity of the Old Testament priests, who were exclusively male and who had the responsibility of teaching God's laws to the people (Mal. 2:7; cf. Deut. 24:8; 2 Kings 12:2; 17:27–28; 2 Chron. 15:3; Neh. 8:9; Hos. 4:6; Mic. 3:11), and was also distinct from the activity of kings, who ruled the people. Thus, the Old Testament also foreshadows the New Testament encouragement of women to prophesy in churches (Acts 21:9; 1 Cor. 11:5) but not to teach or govern the whole church (1 Cor 14:33–35; 1 Tim 2:11–15; 3:2). (276)

identified in Scripture, and despite the vast majority of their prophecies not being inscripturated for God's people, they were all characterized by *at least* two normative qualities (Deut 13:1–5; 18:15–22)[52]:

1. All predictive or prescriptive prophecy was consistent with what God had previously revealed to his people.[53]
2. All predictive or prescriptive prophecy was verifiable in the present and/or came to fruition in the future.[54]

The twofold qualities that were normative for differentiating true prophets from false prophets across Old Testament history were also paradigmatic for safeguarding the

[52] Some may be tempted to believe that during biblical times, a distinction would have been made between inscripturated prophecy being of a normative character, and audible (non-inscripturated) prophecy being of a lesser authority. A problem with embracing this perspective is that it presupposes a prophetic word can only be authoritative or binding when it is found in the Bible. Yet if taken to its logical conclusion, this would undermine the normative character of a prophet speaking God's words in the *historical moment* that they were first communicated. In many cases, a prophet would speak to people on behalf of God, but the written record of their discourse would come at a later time. An Old Testament example of this would be Nathan's prophecy recorded in 2 Sam 12:7–12, and a New Testament example would be Simeon's prophecy recorded in Luke 2:25–35. Both prophecies were originally declared prior to the portions of Scripture in which they would go on to be documented and preserved, but they were equally as authoritative and equally as superintended by the Holy Spirit at the time they were initially spoken. Samuel E. Waldron further expands on these principles in *To Be Continued: Are the Miraculous Gifts for Today?* (Greenville, SC: Calvary, 2015), 58.

[53] Another pair of common terms for *predictive prophecy* and *prescriptive prophecy* is *foretelling* (in the case of the former) and *forthtelling* (in the case of the latter). John Reuther makes an observable distinction: "Prophecy is either revelation of the Word of the Lord (*forth*telling) or prediction of the future (*fore*telling). Preaching is the closest thing to prophecy, because it is declaring the inscripturated Word of the Lord and not new revelation." John Reuther, *The Gift of the Holy Spirit* (Warrendale, PA: Ichthus, 2021), 153. In addition, since both dimensions of prophecy entailed a person speaking on behalf of God, believers would have a biblically based expectation that any genuine prophetic utterances would be compatible with previous special revelation. This is precisely what Robert L. Thomas stresses: "Divine revelation to a prophet carried the guarantee that the prophet would report it accurately to his listeners and not weaken its authority through human mistakes. Hence, it was binding that the hearers (or readers) submit to the doctrinal and ethical standards of the revelation." Robert L. Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts: A Verse-by-Verse Study of 1 Corinthians 12–14* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 139.

[54] Whether in the Old Testament or the New Testament, the verification and realization of a prophecy was directly connected to recognizing whether one was a true prophet of God. Within the context of critiquing Grudem's argument that evaluating the credibility of a prophecy is tantamount to standing in judgment upon God's Word, Kenneth L. Gentry Jr. confirms that "the people of Israel were to 'judge' Moses and the prophets (Deut. 18:21–22; Num. 16:28–30); they were to 'test the spirits to see whether they be of God' (1 John 4:1). And that testing was to be based on the prophecy given, as is most clearly the case in 1 Corinthians 14:29." Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Charismatic Gift of Prophecy* (Memphis, TN: Footstool, 1989), 63–64.

normative function entrusted to divinely appointed spokesmen within New Testament history.[55] Like their Old Covenant counterparts, a New Covenant believer could not be regarded as a prophet *indefinitely* if they were not genuinely receiving spontaneous revelations from God and imparting those revelations to God's people.[56] Whereas false prophets could deceive God's people for a season, the aggregate fruit of a self-identifying prophet would eventually lead to a false prophet's exposure and a true prophet's confirmation.[57] Upon perusing the Old Testament's holistic representation, Jason S.

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[55] Assessing the characteristics of Old and New Testament prophets/prophecy will inevitably reveal significant points of continuity. Waldron insists, "A true prophet possesses, and must possess, two infallible marks: (1) what he prophesies must *always* come true; (2) he must not contradict previous revelation, but teach people to follow the true God (the God revealed through Moses)." Waldron, *To Be Continued?*, 52. John Walvoord likewise notes these similarities between Old and New Testament prophets:

> Both [the Old and New Testament prophets] spoke for God; both warned of judgment upon sin; both delivered their message as from God; both dealt with contemporaneous events as well as predicted events of the future. . . . The prophet, if a true prophet, must necessarily deliver a message free from error, a product not of his own mind, but a revelation from God. While prophets were men who could err in judgment and in conduct, as illustrated in Peter's compromise with legalism, in their prophetic messages they must be kept from error. Accordingly, there is no reference in the New Testament to anyone teaching error who is designated a true prophet. (John Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit: A Comprehensive Study of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991], 177–78)

[56] Once again, it bears repeating that this thesis embraces Schreiner's conception of prophecy that is postulated in *Spiritual Gifts*. To review Schreiner's proposed definition of prophecy, see chap. 1n74.

[57] On the heels of his interaction with Deut 12–13, O. Palmer Robertson unpacks the practical safeguards that God implemented to help Israel correctly discern a true prophet from a false prophet. Robertson correctly highlights that one's performance of great works in the name of a deity or deities does not *ipso facto* necessitate their status as a true prophet of God:

> Having declared the exclusiveness of the revelatory words that he brings to them, Moses warns of the danger of false prophets in their midst (Deut. 13:1–18). These false prophets may be able to perform (false) wonders among the people, and the words they say may appear to come to pass. But if they summon the people to follow other gods, they must not be obeyed. For nothing is to be added or taken from the covenantal words spoken to Moses (O. Palmer Robertson, *The Final Word: A Biblical Response to the Case for Tongues & Prophecy Today* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1993], 63)

In addition to the antecedent commentary directed to how Old Covenant believers would be tasked with evaluating the legitimacy of self-identifying prophets, Robertson contends that believers residing in the New Testament era would have been entrusted with a similar responsibility. Robertson outlines his perspective within the context of critiquing the contemporary notion that New Covenant prophecy can be mixed with error:

> The proposal that 1 Corinthians 14 should be read as envisioning error within legitimate new covenant prophecy rather than as anticipating the possibility of false prophets within the church of Corinth builds precariously on an argument from silence. The proposal that the assumed error appears in legitimate new covenant prophecy rather than in false utterances which are not genuine prophecy is an exegetical

DeRouchie has proposed that the fruit of a divinely appointed prophet's ministry was characterized by at least four distinct functions[58]:

1. Indictment: To confront the covenantal violations of God's people (e.g., Mic 3:8–11; Zeph 3:1–4).[59]

2. Instruction: To guide the people of God in the way they should go, often recalling Moses's specific commands in the Law (e.g., 2 Kgs 17:13; Mic 6:8; Zeph 2:3).[60]

3. Warning/Punishment: Words of warning or of imminent punishment against those who have failed to live loyally to the covenant or who have failed to treat God and his people with respect—whether individuals (e.g., 1 Sam 13:13–14; 1 Kgs 11:11–13) or nations (e.g., Isa 17; Jer 8:4–12; Ezek 15; Amos 4:1–3; Mic 3:7–12).[61]

4. Hope/Salvation: Words of comfort predict a day when God, after punishing his people with exile and death, would renew his relationship with his people (e.g., Isa 10:5–12:6; Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 36:16–32; Amos 9:13–15; Zech 8:2–3, 7–8).[62]

Against the aforementioned backdrop of how the Old Testament depicts the prophetic office and function, contemporary debates have centered around the degree to which the New Testament follows suit.[63] Some Christians are of the persuasion that

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> argument that hangs on a string. The absence of any mention of false prophets in 1 Corinthians 14 hardly provides a basis for establishing a new kind of legitimate prophecy in the new covenant community, a prophecy that contains error mixed with truth. Recognizing that judgments had to be made concerning new covenant prophecies does not in itself distinguish this kind of prophecy from old covenant prophecy. Clearly this recognition would not in itself indicate that legitimate new covenant prophecy could at times be false (101–2).

[58] In supplementation to what is enumerated in the text above, the fourfold functioning of an Old Testament prophet is extensively developed by Jason S. DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament: Twelve Steps From Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2017), 46–51.

[59] DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament*, 47.

[60] DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament*, 47.

[61] DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament*, 49.

[62] DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament*, 50.

[63] The first issue of vol. 44 in the *Themelios* is saturated with relevant material to the spiritual gift of prophecy and whether it has continued beyond the apostolic era of church history. Of the various helpful articles, a written exchange between Thomas R. Schreiner and Andrew Wilson provides a sample of scholarly debate for/against the continuation of prophecy throughout New Covenant history. See Thomas R. Schreiner, "It All Depends Upon Prophecy: A Brief Case for Nuanced Cessationism," *Themelios* 44, no. 1 (April 2019): 29–35; Andrew Wilson, "The Continuation of the Charismata," *Themelios* 44, no. 1 (April 2019): 16–22.

prophecy under the New Covenant must be seen in a fundamentally separate category than prophecy under the Old Covenant.[64] According to this view, the spiritual gift of prophecy carries a lesser authority than what is recorded in Scripture, in addition to what was verbally disclosed by Old Testament prophets or New Testament apostles.[65] Consequently, those serving within the apostolic office are to be regarded as the only individuals who speak and write God's infallible words because under the New Covenant those with the spiritual gift of prophecy can be susceptible to error.[66]

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[64] Sam Storms candidly classifies New Covenant prophecy as fundamentally distinct from Old Covenant prophecy; the former is capable of error and carries a lesser authority than the latter. An elaboration on these beliefs is encapsulated in Sam Storms, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts: A Comprehensive Guide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 172. Virtually all cessationists insist that the New Testament gift of prophecy is the same as prophecy in the Old Testament. Since the latter was always infallible, the former must also be without error. Thus, any notion of a fallible prophetic word—a word that contains both elements of truth and potential error—is ruled out right from the start. Continuationists, on the other hand, believe that the New Testament gift of prophecy is of a lesser authority than that which is seen in the Old Testament. It often comes as a mixture of infallible divine revelation and human, potentially fallible interpretation and application. Since I am a continuationist, I embrace the view that what is seen in the New Testament exercise of the prophetic gift carries the potential for error.

[65] One of the key passages pertaining to whether New Covenant prophecy is of a lesser authority than Old Covenant prophecy is 1 Cor 14. In the midst of his exegetical commentary on that chapter, D. A. Carson highlights that vv. 37–38 clearly distinguish apostolic authority from the authority of the first century prophets. That is to say, since the apostles produced canonical revelation (like the Old Covenant prophets), and since non-apostles who had the spiritual gift of prophecy in the first century church did not produce canonical revelation, there must be a distinction in the authority of the prophetic words dispensed by both parties. Carson reflects,

> That Paul's authority should be placed so decisively above that of the prophets has obvious bearing on our understanding of prophecy in Corinth. Paul clearly believes that prophecy is revelatory (see v. 30); equally clearly, he does not conclude on this ground that the authority of the prophets is therefore absolute. . . . The presupposition seems to be that if a prophecy is in any sense revelatory, it must be true, and thus authoritative—and therefore what is there to prevent a contemporary "prophet" from, say, annulling various components of the new covenant in such a way that the New Testament writers claim to fulfill and therefore transcend certain aspects of the old covenant? But the remarkable fact is that Paul takes the prophecy *of his own day* to be in some sense revelatory (14:30) and yet to have less authority than his own written word. One cannot fail to perceive that those interpretations of New Testament prophecy that insist it enjoys the same authority status as Old Testament canonical prophecy see in the phenomenon a great deal more than the apostle himself allows. (D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12–14* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019], 172)

[66] The recognition of the New Testament prophet's susceptibility to error, and their non-binding authority, is delineated by Anthony Thiselton: "While the speaker believes that such [prophetic] utterances or discourses come from the Holy Spirit, mistakes can be made, and since believers, including ministers or prophets, remain humanly fallible, claims to prophecy must be weighed and tested." Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 965.

While proponents of this view would affirm that New Covenant prophecy was rooted in something God spontaneously brought to an individual's mind, there was no guarantee or safeguard that the recipient of such revelation would accurately convey it with their own words.[67] From this perspective, unless communicated by an apostle, the content of New Covenant prophetic utterances was not normative for a believer's doctrine or practice.[68] Insofar the foregoing characteristics are true of New Testament prophecy, some are led to make the case that those with this spiritual gift exercised a lesser degree of spiritual authority than those endowed with the spiritual gift of teaching.[69] As arguably the most notable advocate for differentiating the normative function of Old Covenant and New Covenant prophecy, Wayne Grudem helpfully unpacks the antecedent point of view in "Prophecy—Yes, But Teaching—No: Paul's Consistent Advocacy of Women's Participation Without Governing Authority":

> Teaching provided normative doctrinal and ethical guidance for the Church. Those who publicly taught in churches spoke not with authority equal to Scripture itself but with authority that, in practical terms, provided the doctrinal and ethical summaries of Scriptural teachings and the practical applications of Scripture by which the Church was directed. Scripture was the final authority, but teachers—

[67] Andrew Wilson interacts with Thomas Schreiner's primary arguments for what he deems nuanced Cessationism. Within the context of his article, Wilson discusses one of the most polarizing texts in debates on whether New Covenant prophecy is infallible: Acts 21:4 (cf. 1–40). As a self-identifying Continuationist, his comments epitomize the conviction that under the New Covenant it is expected for prophecy to be mixed with elements of truth and error: "What God says is always perfectly true, but what disciples who are prophesying say may contain a mixture of true and false (which is why prophecies need to be 'weighed' and 'tested')." Andrew Wilson, "A Response to Tom Schreiner," *Themelios* 44, no. 1 (April 2019): 39.

[68] The non-normative conception of New Covenant prophecy, flowing out of the subordination of New Testament prophets to the apostles, is communicated by Douglas A. Oss:

> [Prophetic] utterances are not equivalent to Scripture but rather are judged by Scripture. Paul calls on the Corinthians to judge the prophecies given during their worship services (1 Cor. 14:29; cf. 1 Thess. 5:19–22), something he would never command concerning Scripture (e.g., 2 Tim. 3:16). Thus, even during New Testament times, contemporary prophecy (in distinction to canonical prophecy) was not always vested with canonical authority. (Douglas A. Oss, "A Pentecostal/Charismatic View," in Grudem, *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?*, 279)

[69] A representation of twentieth-century Charismatic leaders who cautioned against elevating subjective prophecies beyond the objective expounding of biblical revelation can be accessed in Donald Bridge, *Signs and Wonders Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), 183; Donald Gee, *Spiritual Gifts in the Work of Ministry Today* (Springfield, MO: Gospel, 1963), 51–52.

> more than prophets or evangelists or those with any other gift—were the ones who regularly had the responsibility to show how Scripture (the Church's absolute authority) was to be interpreted and applied in each local congregation. . . . NT Church prophecy had no such authority. Those who prophesied did not tell the Church how to interpret and apply Scripture to life. They did not proclaim the doctrinal and ethical standards by which the Church was guided, nor did they exercise governing authority in the Church. . . . Prophets in NT churches rather reported in their own words something that, it seemed to them, God had forcefully brought to mind. So teaching based on the written Word of God had far greater authority than occasional prophecies that the speaker thought were from God. Prophecies were subordinate to the authoritative teaching of Scripture, and to be accepted, would have had to be in conformity to the received teaching of the Church. But the reverse was not true: Teachings did not have to conform to any collection of or summary of prophecies that had been spoken in the Church.[70]

In contrast to the foregoing convictions, the remainder of this chapter regards Old Covenant and New Covenant prophecy as belonging to the same category. Along with being identified as a divinely bestowed gift to the church following Christ's ascension (Eph 4:9–11), the New Covenant prophets are explicitly identified with the apostles as the foundation of the church (Eph 2:19–22), and as the human agents through which the mystery of Christ has been made known (Eph. 3:4–5).[71] Such observations reveal that

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[70] Wayne Grudem, "Prophecy—Yes, But Teaching—No: Paul's Consistent Advocacy of Women's Participation without Governing Authority," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30, no. 1 (March 1987): 18–19. As indicated by the name of the article that stems from the excerpt associated with this footnote, Grudem argues that a key reason why women were allowed to prophesy in the first century church (1 Cor 11:5), but not teach (1 Tim 2:12), is because teaching carries a higher level of spiritual authority than prophesying. However, one does not necessarily need to differentiate the spiritual authority between the gifts of prophecy and teaching to explain why women were permitted to do the former and not the latter. Thomas R. Schreiner points out,

> When women prayed or prophesied in the church, they were to do so with a demeanor that was submissive to male leadership. Such a reading [of 1 Cor. 11:2–16] explains why Paul draws attention to male headship over women before tackling the issue of adornment. What Paul emphasizes in 1 Corinthians is that women should pray and prophesy with proper adornment, for such adornment signified in Paul's cultural setting that the women prayed and prophesied in a way that was submissive to male leadership in the church. . . . The transcendent principle in [1 Cor. 11:2–16] is not how women adorn themselves, for the message sent by external adornment varies from culture to culture. The principle is that women are to pray and prophesy in such a way that they do not subvert male authority in the church. (Thomas R. Schreiner, Review of "Praying and Prophesying in the Assemblies: 1 Corinthians 11:2–16" [CH 8] by Gordon D. Fee, *Journal for Biblical Manhood & Womanhood* 10, no. 1 [Spring 2005]: 19)

Whereas the spiritual authority of prophecy and teaching can certainly be debated between Cessationists and Continuationists alike, Schreiner provides a viable alternative explanation for how women were able to prophesy in such a way that did not usurp or violate the principle of 1 Tim 2:12.

[71] Although some have argued that the reference to prophets in Eph 2:20 is explanatory of the apostles, Daniel Wallace has shown that there is ample syntactical grounds for seeing the apostles and the

despite being distinct from the apostles in *office*, the New Covenant prophets exercised a synonymous *function*; as the foundation of the church, they provided normative special revelation to the people of God (Acts 16:22–34).[72] This distinctive is not only consistent with the function of Old Covenant prophets (Num 12:6–8; Deut 13:1–5; 18:15–22), but it is also compatible with the lack of explicit biblical teaching on New Covenant prophecy being of a different or inferior class than Old Covenant prophecy.[73]

While some have insinuated that the New Testament's exhortations to examine prophecies are indicative of their fallibility and inferiority to Old Covenant prophecy (e.g.,

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prophets as two distinct groups. See Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 284–86.

[72] Upon synthesizing Eph 2:19–22 with 3:4–5 and 4:11–13, Thomas J. Nettles deduces that the New Covenant prophets of the first century were providing normative special revelation to God's people:

> The prophets of the New Testament received revelation that was of the same quality and truthfulness as that received by the apostles. They did not have the same historical qualifications as apostles and were under the authority of the apostles. Nevertheless, their messages to and in the churches were accepted as revelatory. . . . In Ephesians, Paul stated that God's household was "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone" (2:20). That he referred to the prophets of the New Testament church is verified just a few verses down when he reminded the Ephesian Christians that both his speaking and writing arose from a single stream of revelation and that the prophets who functioned in their churches received revelation also. (Thomas J. Nettles, *The Privilege, Promise, Power & Peril of Doctrinal Preaching* [Greenbrier, AR: Free Grace, 2018], 177)

Nettles goes on to highlight how

> Silas had been confirmed in the Spirit and in the eyes of the church as a prophet and was commissioned by the church at Antioch to go on [a] second missionary tour with Paul. He functioned as an equal partner in labor, teaching, suffering, and preaching. Read Acts 16:22–34 for the record of Silas's participation with Paul in the full task of apostolic missions and teaching the gospel even in its virgin voyage into Europe. (178)

[73] Whereas some may claim that it is an argument from silence, the lack of an explicit biblical passage to categorically differentiate Old and New Covenant prophecy is noteworthy on its own terms. Waldron teases this vignette:

> New Testament prophets are never explicitly or overtly distinguished from Old Testament prophets. This is the simple fact of the matter, and it is a fact by itself conclusive for the question at hand. We must not forget that, when prophecy and prophets are mentioned in the church after Pentecost, these words and the institution they represented were well known to the Jews. Old Testament prophecy was, by common consent, inspired and infallible in its pronouncements (Deut. 18:15–22). If New Testament prophecy in distinction from Old Testament prophecy was not infallible in its pronouncements, this would have constituted an absolutely fundamental contrast between the Old Testament institution and the New Testament institution. To suppose that a difference as important as this would be passed over without explicit comment is unthinkable. (Waldron, *To Be Continued?*, 65)

1 Cor 14:29; 1 Thess 5:20–21), both Old Covenant prophets and New Covenant apostles are nevertheless held to the same standard (Deut. 18:20–22; Acts 17:11).[74] Others who allege that the narrative of Acts 21 reveals a New Covenant prophet that incorrectly delivered a Spirit-inspired message have to, in turn, explain (1) how the Spirit was not somehow responsible for the miscommunication and (2) how alternate interpretations do not account for the prophetic utterance being fulfilled.[75] Lastly, the notion that New Covenant prophecy is of a lesser authority to New Covenant teaching does not adequately account for the foundational role that prophecy exemplified for the universal church (along with apostleship), or for the enrichment of specific local church contexts (Acts 13:1; 15:32).[76] Like their Old Covenant counterparts, true New Covenant prophets were instrumental in dispensing special revelation without error, and they did so in a manner

[74] Richard M. Blaylock highlights the consistent theme of Old Covenant prophets, apostles, and New Covenant prophets being subject to biblical examination:

> Several proponents of the limited authority view [of New Covenant prophets] find support in texts that teach the church to test prophecies. According to their reading, these verses (especially 1 Corinthians 14:29) instruct the congregation to discern which parts of each prophecy were true and which parts were false. However, 1 Corinthians 14:29 probably refers to making distinctions *between* prophecies rather than *within* prophecies. This type of instruction would be expected given the dangers of false prophets. And in light of the repeated warnings regarding this threat, it is telling that the apostles never provide explicit indications that true prophets may be dangerous as well. Moreover, when the Bereans sifted the apostles' message in Acts 17:11, their authority was not thereby called into question. In fact, Paul himself admits that his proclamations needed to be consistent with the gospel if they were to be received (Gal 1:8–9). On analogy then, the testing of prophecies does not necessarily imply the existence of non-authoritative prophets. (Richard M. Blaylock "Towards a Definition of New Testament Prophecy," *Themelios* 44, no. 1 [April 2019]: 56)

[75] Thomas observes that the same introductory phrase that Agabus uses when delivering his prophecy (τάδε λέγει) is the same phrase the Lord Jesus Christ employs in seven other places in the New Testament (Rev 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). Thus, to ascribe error to Agabus's prophecy in Acts 21:10–11 poses significant interpretive problems when seeking to view it against the backdrop of Scripture. Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, 137–8. Moreover, Thomas notes how Acts 28:17 underscores Paul's agreement with Agabus's prophecy, and contends that the prophecy should be seen in a similar light to Peter's sermon in Acts 2:23 or the scourging of Jesus in John 19:1. Namely, "the Jews were the ones who bound Paul, that is, they were the instigators of his binding. It is common to speak of the responsible party or parties as performing an act even though he or they may not have been the immediate agent(s)" (138).

[76] Passages like Acts 13:1 and Acts 15:32 are just a couple of cross-references that reveal how prophets *and* teachers were instrumental in the normative doctrinal and ethical guidance for the church. N72 of this chap. also provides a select example that Nettles expounds to support this contention. Of course, these perspectives are contrary to the position that Grudem espoused in "Prophecy—Yes, But Teaching—No," 18–19.

that aligned with God's prescribed method of communication (1 Cor. 14:26–40; esp. vv. 37–40).[77]

For *at least* these reasons, each of the functions undergirding Old Covenant prophecy that were previously referenced from DeRouchie are equally applicable to New Covenant prophecy.[78] As opined by David E. Aune, "the early Christian application of the designation [προφήτης] to individual Christians . . . was originally determined by the prevalent conception of the prophetic role of the Old Testament."[79] Yet in

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[77] True prophets of God always dispense their revelation in accordance with God's expressed parameters in Scripture. This principle even goes down to the minutiae of how male and female prophets were to conduct themselves within the context of a corporate worship service. Denny Burk provides a thought-provoking illustration of the aforesaid scenario:

> The fact of female prophecy in the Old and New Testaments is no argument in favor of female teaching/preaching. The gifts of prophecy and teaching are distinct in Paul's writings, and Paul, therefore, regulates them differently. While Paul allows women to prophesy in the presence of men, he does not allow them to teach men (1 Tim 2:12; 1 Cor 14:34–36). This feature of the New Testament's teaching about gifts and ministry is lost whenever the gifts of prophecy and teaching are conflated. This is a confusion that careful readers of Scripture should wish to avoid. (Denny Burk, "Broad Complementarianism in the Southern Baptist Convention," *Journal for Baptist Theology & Ministry* 17, no. 1 [Spring 2020]: 33)

Just as the Old Covenant prophets were not exempt from abiding by the prescribed stipulations of Old Covenant commands, so also are New Covenant prophets bound to operate with compliance to the prescribed stipulations of New Covenant commands.

[78] Within the context of positing a variety of exegetical, theological, and historical arguments, F. David Farnell underscores how the New Testament's portrayal of prophecy presupposes continuity with its representation throughout the Old Testament:

> [New Testament] prophecy is fundamentally a development and continuation of [Old Testament] prophecy. The NT does not conceptualize any substantial differences in kind between prophetic expressions in the OT and those in the NT. The vocabulary and phraseology are the same. . . . OT prophets were seen as writing the very words of the Lord in regard to future happenings. This continuity of OT prophecy to NT prophecy is borne out elsewhere in the NT. The NT prophet Agabus modeled his prophetic style after the OT prophets. The historian Luke relates that Agabus "indicated by the Spirit" that a famine was about to occur in the world (Acts 11:28a). He then records the occurrence of the famine in accord with Agabus's prediction (Acts 11:28b). Later Agabus introduces a prophecy with the words "This is what the Holy Spirit says" (Acts 21:11), an expression that reflects a pattern similar to Matthew's fulfillment formulae when introducing OT prophecies (e.g., Matt. 2:15, 17; 3:3). It also parallels the OT prophetic formula, "Thus says the Lord." It is significant also that no attempt is ever made to distinguish between OT and NT prophetic expression in the vocabulary of introductions to NT prophecy. (F. David Farnell, "Fallible New Testament Prophecy/Prophets? A Critique of Wayne Grudem's Hypothesis," *Master's Seminary Journal* 2, no. 2 [1991]: 172–73).

[79] David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 195.

conjunction with the preceding contours of Old Testament prophecy, Robert L. Thomas makes a case to perceive prophecy as taking on *even more* functions in the church age.[80] Thus, the following list is derived from Thomas's article, "The Spiritual Gift of Prophecy in Rev 22:18," which encapsulates his analysis of how the New Testament depicts the spiritual gift of prophecy[81]:

1. The gift [of prophecy] involved immediate divine inspiration of the spokesperson or writer.[82]
2. The gift [of prophecy] provided exhortation and encouragement.[83]

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[80] Once again, Farnell is helpful on further clarifying this matter: while there are not any substantial differences "to warrant a distinction between two kinds of prophetic gifts or expressions that were operable in the OT or the NT," there are notable expansions to how prophecy functioned during the first century AD. These expansions are developed in subsequent pages of this thesis. Farnell, "Fallible New Testament Prophecy/Prophets?," 172.

[81] A further expansion of the items transcribed in this catalog can be accessed in Robert L. Thomas, "The Spiritual Gift of Prophecy in Rev 22:18," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 32, no. 2 (June 1989): 201–16. Nevertheless, the sixteen characteristics of prophecy delineated in this thesis come directly from pp. 202–4 of Thomas's article. It is also interesting to note that in the article Thomas makes a distinction between the spiritual gift of prophecy and prophecy *per se*. For example, he asserts,

> There are differences between [the gift of prophecy] to the body of Christ on the one hand and prophecy practiced in the [Old Testament] and in Judaism on the other. The [New Testament] prophet did not enjoy unlimited authority as did the [Old Testament] prophet. He was a member of the community, not an authority figure over it. The Apocalypse appears to be an exception to this, until it is remembered that here apostolic authority is represented, not just prophetic authority.(204)

While this thesis agrees with Thomas's observations regarding the apostles personifying the highest degree of *ecclesiological authority* in the church age, it must be emphasized that true prophets spoke with equal *didactic authority* to the apostles *insofar* they uttered the oracles of God. To be sure, while the apostle Paul identifies apostleship as a gift to the body of Christ and even identifies it as the highest gift (1 Cor 12:28–29), both the apostles and the prophets spoke with equal authority *insofar* they both spoke on behalf of God (Eph 2:20). Since the apostles and true prophets would communicate divine revelation to first century churches, they would likewise never contradict one another in their verbal or written testimony because God's Word is always true and truth itself is a coherent unity (Num 23:19; John 17:17; 2 Tim 2:13). These convictions must be maintained in an effort to avoid the misnomer that the prophet's lesser *ecclesiological authority* (i.e., those with the gift of prophecy were subordinate to the apostles in view of the first century's spiritual leadership hierarchy) entailed them possessing either a lesser *didactic authority*, or that they were capable of producing fallible prophecy. Wayne A. Grudem makes such a case at various points in *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Eastbourne, England: Kingsway, 1988), 87–96.

[82] Thomas cites numerous authors to demonstrate that this is a commonly held conviction amongst conservative New Testament scholars regarding the function of prophecy in the first century. Thomas, "The Spiritual Gift of Prophecy," 202.

[83] Thomas underlines that this dimension of New Covenant prophecy pertains to its forthtelling function, and it is apparent that this element has continuity with DeRouchie's observations about the function of prophets under the Old Covenant. According to Thomas, "the prophet gives God's call to repentance,

3. Another aspect of prophecy was its element of teaching.[84]
4. The gift of prophecy incorporated prediction.[85]
5. The gift [of prophecy] entailed a degree of authority less than that of the OT prophets and the NT apostles, but some kind of authority was present.[86]
6. A further characteristic of NT prophecy was its inclusion of an ability to discern the validity of other prophecies.[87]
7. Gifted prophets had an ability to perceive the thoughts and motives of other persons (cf. Luke 7:39; John 4:19; Acts 5:3–4; 8:21 ff.).[88]
8. Exercise of the gift [of prophecy] was occasionally accompanied by symbolic acts.[89]
9. Another phenomenon was that most often prophets were residents in a single locality, but some were also itinerant.[90]

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which torments some (e.g., Rev. 11:3, 10) but which convicts others to turn to God (e.g., 1 Cor. 14:24–25)." Thomas, "The Spiritual Gift of Prophecy," 202.

[84] In keeping with the definition of prophecy that Schreiner proposes for prophecy (which has been reiterated throughout the thesis), Thomas stresses that "the ministry of the prophets was . . . spontaneous, being based upon direct divine revelations. Teachers, on the other hand, preserved and interpreted Christian tradition, including relevant OT passages, the sayings of Jesus and traditional beliefs of earlier Christian teaching." Thomas, "The Spiritual Gift of Prophecy," 202.

[85] As indicated by a surface level reading of this distinctive, the foretelling function of prophecy is what Thomas has in mind. Thomas, "The Spiritual Gift of Prophecy," 202.

[86] N64 in this chap. explicates what Thomas is getting at with this particular function of New Covenant prophecy. Thomas, "The Spiritual Gift of Prophecy," 202.

[87] Thomas utilizes 1 Cor 14:29 as a prooftext for this function of prophecy. Thomas, "The Spiritual Gift of Prophecy," 203. For Thomas, "the others" mentioned in this passage speak to other prophets in a congregation who could discern the certitude of a prophetic utterance that was given within the context of corporate worship. While this interpretation seems to do the best justice to this verse's immediate context (Thomas cites a handful of those who share this view), others would note that the verse could also have the entire congregation in view (including those who limit the spiritual gift of prophecy to the first century AD). Robert L. Saucy surveys some of the interpretive challenges undergirding 1 Cor 14:29 in his chapter, "An Open but Cautious View," in Grudem, *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?*, 128, 146–48.

[88] Thomas uniquely associates this function of the spiritual gift of prophecy with what was observable from the ministries of Christ (e.g., John 2:24–25) and the apostle Paul (e.g., 1 Cor 14:24–25). Thomas, "The Spiritual Gift of Prophecy," 203.

[89] According to Thomas, an example of this function of prophecy would be the apostle John swallowing a small book (Rev 10:8–11). This type of symbolic act accompanying prophecy in the New Testament points back to similar instances in the Old Testament (e.g., Ezekiel visually illustrating Babylon's eventual destruction of Jerusalem; Ezek 4:1–8). Thomas, "The Spiritual Gift of Prophecy," 203.

[90] Thomas, "The Spiritual Gift of Prophecy," 203.

10. A further feature [of prophecy] was that most NT prophecy was oral, but some was written.[91]

11. Prophetic language was characterized by a variety of literary forms.[92]

12. Another characteristic of prophecy was its dependence on the Holy Spirit.[93]

13. Another observation calls attention to the gift [of prophecy's] not being an office in the Church but rather a regular ministry to the Church.[94]

14. A further point is that the gift entailed the prophet's being in a special state of "ecstasy."[95]

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[91] The attesting evidence for this function of prophecy is that the New Testament does not contain every divinely granted word to be uttered by a Christian with the spiritual gift of prophecy. The fact that the New Testament does not even contain every statement made by the Lord Jesus Christ further punctuates this reflection being made by Thomas (e.g., John 21:25; Acts 20:35). Presumably, there were dozens of individuals in the first century (universal) church whose prophetic words were never recorded in the canon of Scripture. And yet, such words would have been in keeping with the doctrinal and practical truths to be transmitted and preserved in God's Word for all time. Thomas, "The Spiritual Gift of Prophecy," 203.

[92] By "literary forms," Thomas intends to observe how prophecy could be communicated through the use of discursive language, dramatic language, narrative language, poetic language, etc. Admittedly, aside from what can be observed throughout the book of Revelation, there is not much New Testament samples to examine for a robust evaluation of this particular function. Thomas, "The Spiritual Gift of Prophecy," 203.

[93] At every point of their Christian life, a believer with the spiritual gift of prophecy was dependent upon the Holy Spirit for the bestowal and utilization of the gift. Complete reliance upon the Holy Spirit for the exercising of prophecy was a fundamental entailment of how God led a follower of Jesus Christ to articulate special revelation in the first place. As the apostle Peter writes in 2 Pet 1:20–21, "no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." Thomas, "The Spiritual Gift of Prophecy," 203.

[94] On the basis of harmonizing Eph 4:11–13, 1 Cor 12–14, and Rom 12:4, Thomas notes that some may take exception to his distinction between the function of prophecy and the office of prophecy. An example of one who would disagree with differentiating the *function* (gift) of prophecy with the *office* of prophet is Geerhardus Vos, who writes,

> In the New Testament, prophets appear along with the apostles (Eph. 3:5; 2:20; 4:11; 1 Tim. 1:18; 4:14; 1 Cor. 14:3; 13:8; Rev. 11:6). From these passages, it appears that in the apostolic era the gift to speak for the edification of the congregation was developed in an extraordinary way, that through the Spirit mysteries were revealed, future things sometimes foretold (Acts 13:1–2; 11:28). To that extent, this prophetic office was temporary and extraordinary. (Geerhardus Vos, *Ecclesiology, the Means of Grace, Eschatology*, vol. 5 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. and trans. Richard B. Gaffin [Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2012], 54)

[95] Thomas notes that this is a debated point regarding the functional outworking of New Testament prophecy. Thomas, "The Spiritual Gift of Prophecy," 203. However, a fascinating explanation for a prophet's ecstatic state is set forth by Leon J. Wood in his article, "Ecstasy and Israel's Early Prophets," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 9, no. 3 (Summer 1966): 125–37. Essentially, Wood surmises that those with the gift of prophecy were characterized by speaking on behalf of God with fervency as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (136–37). Given the biblical portrait of a prophet, Wood's insights would fit well with the fourteenth prophetic function identified by Thomas.

15. The [gift of prophecy] provided for a "charismatic exegesis" of traditional material.[96]

16. A last characteristic is that the spiritual gift [of prophecy] was described as in some sense temporary.[97]

So whether viewed through the lens of the Old Testament or the New Testament, the intrinsically normative *nature* of God's special revelation to man is coterminous with the intrinsically normative *function* of prophecy.[98] Whereas prophecy was ordinarily

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[96] Thomas explains that the apostles amassed doctrinal and practical insights from portions of Scripture that had never been attained in the history of biblical interpretation. Robert L. Thomas, "The New Testament Use of the Old Testament," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 79–98. He also suggests that the apostles were able to garner "meanings that could be revealed only through an interpreter possessing divine insight" (e.g., Isa. 59:20–21; 27:9 in Rom. 11:25–26). Thomas, "The Spiritual Gift of Prophecy," 204. With the aforementioned commentary in mind, although it is outside the scope of this thesis to delve into *every* implication stemming from apostolic hermeneutics, a key point of emphasis centers on *how* the apostles were able to draw the conclusions they did from God's Word. Namely, "charismatic exegesis," or Holy Spirit directed interpretation to uncover the fuller sense of a given passage of Scripture (i.e., *sensus plenior*). For Thomas, those who possessed the spiritual gift of prophecy would have joined the apostles in their ability to draw deeper meanings from God's special revelation. For a deeper dive into competing perspectives on *sensus plenior*, see G. K. Beale, ed., *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), esp. part 2.

[97] Despite conceding the multitude of interpretations that can be championed by Cessationists and Continuationists alike, Thomas reinforces the principle that 1 Cor 13:8–13 makes it abundantly clear that a time is coming in which the sign gifts of the Holy Spirit will cease (including prophecy). Whether during the first century AD, at the second coming of Jesus Christ, or at some point in between, Cessationists and Continuationists both agree that there will be a period when there is no longer a need for prophecy (or the other sign gifts of the Holy Spirit). In this sense, New Covenant prophecy is framed as "in some sense temporary."

[98] By virtue of God's special revelation being chiefly authoritative, it alone has the right (and power) to bind every conscience that it comes into contact with; the words God speaks to man are always of a normative nature. With this reality in mind, Jaroslav Pelikan connects the normative nature of God's spoken word to the normative function of divinely appointed figures who speak authoritatively on God's behalf (i.e., prophesy):

> The word *prophet* (a compound from the Greek word for "speaker") does not mean in the first instance someone who predicts the future, but one who speaks out on behalf of God—not one who *fore*tells, therefore, but one who tells-*forth* (which often also includes, of course, foretelling the future). The primary and defining characteristic of the biblical prophet, then, is to be sought in the divine vocation and mission of telling and speaking in the name and by the designated authority of Another [i.e., God]. Already in the historical books of the Tanakh, the stock formula employed for a special revelation from God to a prophet is "the word of the LORD then came" Within the texts of the writings of the Prophets, this same formula provides the credentials and the commissioning for the speaking of God to the prophet and therefore through the prophet. . . . As the emissaries for the Word of God in person and witnesses to his life, death, and resurrection, the disciples and apostles of Jesus [also] present themselves to their hearers as those to whom the definitive Word of God has come (Jaroslav Pelikan connects the normative nature of God's spoken word to the normative function of divinely appointed

dispensed by individuals who were identified as prophets prior to the New Covenant, both prophets *and* apostles were prophetic agents after the coming of Christ.[99] In addition to their Old Testament counterparts, the New Testament apostles and prophets infallibly articulated the spontaneous revelations they received from God, rendering all people accountable to heed the prophetic oracles to which they had been exposed.[100] This principle equally applies to the original recipients of verbal prophecy and to any subsequent parties who have encountered prophetic utterances through the written Word of God.[101] Albeit, a good and necessary question that can arise from the preceding conclusions is whether

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figures who speak authoritatively on God's behalf (i.e., prophesy). (Jaroslav Pelikan, *Whose Bible Is It? A History of the Scriptures Through the Ages* [London: Penguin, 2006], 11–12)

[99] For a succinct overview of how prophecy was dispensed, as well as through whom prophecy was dispensed before and after the coming of Christ, see Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 880–97.

[100] This sentence is a paraphrase of the understanding for prophecy that is employed by Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 77, 93. Chap. 1nn74–75 offers a substantial expansion on how prophecy is being portrayed at this stage in this chap.

[101] Whether delivered verbally or in writing, God's special revelation is equally authoritative—and therefore—equally binding upon man. A key passage of Scripture confirming this conviction is found in Matt 22:31–32, wherein Jesus cites Exod 3:6 to offer the following challenge to the Sadducees' denial of the resurrection: "Regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?' He is not the God of the dead but of the living." Robert J. Sheehan elaborates on the inseparability between the authoritative nature of God's special revelation to man, along with the authority connected to the verbal and written mediums through which God's appointed messengers (i.e., Old Testament prophets/New Testament Apostles and prophets) delivered his special revelation:

> Peter asserts that the [Old Testament] prophecy originates with God, not the prophet, and that when the prophet speaks, he speaks 'from God' and does so being 'carried along by the Holy Spirit' (2 Peter 1:20–21). He speaks not as a free agent, but under the Holy Spirit's direction. A person who is being carried along is in the power of the carrier. He goes where he is taken. The prophet speaks as one who is under the authority of another [i.e., God]. . . . As with the Old Testament prophets, [the Apostles] were neither creators nor developers of the truth revealed, but proclaimers. For this reason, their teachings, whether spoken or written, were to be received as from Christ himself. To agree with the apostles was to be in harmony with God. To disagree with the apostles was to be in a state of alienation with God (1 Cor. 14:37–38; 1 John 4:5–6). Alongside the limited number of New Testament apostles were a larger number of New Testament prophets. . . . New Testament prophecy is described as the receiving of revelation and the person who prophesies is referred to as a prophet (1 Cor. 14:30–31, 37). The apostles and prophets of the New Testament era are partakers of the same revelation of the mystery of Christ revealed by the Spirit (Eph. 3:4–5). (Robert J. Sheehan, *The Word of Truth: Scripture: Its Origin, Sufficiency and Relevance* [Darlington, UK: Evangelical, 1998], 45–46, 50–52)

believers should expect for prophecy to *continue until* the Last Day.[102] The following section will devote space to addressing this important and highly prevalent inquiry posited by Christians around the globe.[103]

Recognizing the Relationship between the Gift of Prophecy and the Cessation of Normative Post-Apostolic Revelation

When contemplating whether prophecy continues to be an ongoing experience for God's people, it is common to recognize how prophecy is inextricably linked with the other sign gifts of the Holy Spirit.[104] Many have pondered the extent to which the people

[102] A sampling of the inquiry predicated in this footnote's corresponding sentence is manifested in Saucy, "An Open but Cautious View." By his own admission, Saucy takes "an open but cautious view" regarding the Cessationism-Continuationism debate and has legitimate questions as to whether the sign gifts of the Holy Spirit endure beyond the apostolic era (i.e., the first century AD). While Saucy acknowledges "the uniqueness of the apostolic era" (100) and "that not all has remained the same in the church with regard to the miraculous gifts" (102), he is not ready to rule out the possibility that such miraculous gifts could occur until the Last Day. Nevertheless, Saucy concedes that the gift of apostle was uniquely tied to the first century AD (102), and he demonstrates that the continuation of the sign gifts of the Holy Spirit must remain consistent with how they are portrayed in the New Testament (including the gift of prophecy; 128). However, in contrast to scholarly Continuationists such as Grudem and Storms, Saucy does not see any substantial difference between the normative character of Old Testament prophecy and the normative character of New Testament prophecy; for Saucy, both are equally accurate and equally authoritative (127–28).

[103] It would be an understatement to say that discussions pertaining to the continuation of apostleship and/or prophecy are occurring on a wide spectrum amongst Christians throughout the world. In their extensively researched article, Gina A. Zurlo, Todd M. Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing document the *hundreds* of millions of Christians who comprise overtly Continuationist denominations, as well as the doctrinal and practical struggles that have accompanied these denominations in recent years. Gina A. Zurlo, Todd M. Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing, "World Christianity and Mission 2021: Questions about the Future," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 45, no. 1 (2021): 15–25. Regardless of where one lands in the Cessationism-Continuationism debate, the continued expansion of Continuationist denominations around the world indicates that this conversation is not going away anytime soon. Thus, an equal measure of clarity and charity will be essential to promoting fruitful dialogue between believers of varying convictions.

[104] Michael Horton explicates in *Rediscovering the Holy Spirit* how all the sign gifts of the Holy Spirit are connected with one another (i.e., apostle, prophecy, tongues, and healings/miracles). His insights are noteworthy at this point:

> Most of the contemporary debates over tongues, prophecy, and healing turn on whether these gifts continue in our day. In my view, this is a secondary question. The deeper and primary question is twofold: first of all, what these gifts were in the first place, in their apostolic context; second, why we tend to identify these gifts particularly as the fruit of Pentecost, when the chief evidence of the outpouring of the Spirit was the preaching of the gospel that led so many people to conviction of guilt and trust in Christ. I call it a twofold question because both are inextricably linked. It is clear from Acts that the purpose of the gifts whose continuous operation is disputed were from the beginning in

of God should remain expectant of speaking in tongues, healing the sick, and prophesying to the edification of other believers in a local church.[105] Yet as salient as such investigations are for the body of Christ, the underlying purpose of this chapter delimits space to determining whether *prophecy* has continued beyond the apostolic era.[106]

A straightforward reading of the New Testament leaves no doubt that many first century Christians were equipped by the Holy Spirit to perform remarkable works in the name of Jesus.[107] What is more, a variety of biblical scholars have argued that the New

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> service to the spread of the word. All sides can agree that the book of Acts is filled with signs and wonders attesting to new-covenant revelation. The Pauline epistles refer to the activity of apostles and prophets, as well as to gifts of healing, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. (Michael Horton, *Rediscovering the Holy Spirit: God's Perfecting Presence in Creation, Redemption, and Everyday Life* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017], 235)

[105] The wording of the sentence is a slight modification to what Sam Storms writes in *Practicing the Power: Welcoming the Gifts of the Spirit in Your Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 13. The verbatim excerpt from Storms is the following: "A congregation of born-again followers of Jesus who are gospel-centered, who maintain a high view of the sovereignty of God in salvation, and who are intolerant of manipulative excess and self-serving fanaticism, yet who also delight in speaking in tongues, praying for the sick, and prophesying to the edification, encouragement, and consolation of other believers" (13).

[106] As noted in chap. 1n10, although much of what is discussed throughout the thesis will be relevant to broader ruminations of cessationism, the more narrow focus—especially in this chap.—is geared toward the cessationism of normative post-apostolic revelation during the new covenant epoch of redemptive history. Nonetheless, all broader references to Cessationism or Continuationism that go beyond the scope of prophecy remain tangential to this chapter's overarching direction.

[107] Upon tracing out the Holy Spirit's depiction from the standpoint of biblical theology and systematic theology Gregg R. Allison and Andreas J. Köstenberger allocate ample space to discussing how believers of all stripes were raised up to carry out mighty pneumatological works. Gregg R. Allison and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Holy Spirit* (Nashville: B & H, 2020). In keeping with what is identified throughout the aforementioned volume, prominent *historical examples* of prophecy, tongues, and healings/miracles being exercised by apostles and non-apostles alike are recorded below. The fundamental purpose for mentioning these examples is to augment the exceptional (as opposed to the normative) character of the New Testament era (i.e., the first century AD broadly considered). For the sake of emphasizing the historical nature of the preceding works, each Scripture citation included in Allison and Köstenberger's publication is derived from the book of Acts. In the event that the subsequently documented verses do not encompass the totality of a Spirit-empowered circumstance, the surrounding context is alluded to parenthetically.

Apostolic Prophecy: Acts 28:25–26 (cf. 28:23–31) (96).

Non-Apostolic Prophecy: Acts 21:10–11 (92).

Apostolic Tongues: Acts 2:1–13 (84).

Non-Apostolic Tongues: Acts 10:34–48 (85).

Testament does not *explicitly* prescribe any changes to how Christians will be spiritually endowed for ministry in future generations of church history.[108] D. A. Carson and Thomas R. Schreiner exemplify how the foregoing contention is advocated by some of the most prominent Cessationists and Continuationists in the present day.[109] Carson writes,

> At the exegetical level, the charismatic movement is surely right to argue that the χαρίσματα (*charismata*), including the more spectacular of them, have not been permanently withdrawn. Critics may rightly insist that in many (though certainly not all) charismatic circles, too much attention is devoted to too few gifts, and almost always the spectacular ones. Critics may also rightly question the linkage that is often made between tongues and second-blessing theology. But in my judgment there is no substantial exegetical or theological impediment to recognizing the continued existence of the gift of, say, tongues.[110]

Schreiner explains,

> It should be acknowledged that the arguments for a cessationist reading aren't open and shut. Nowhere does the New Testament clearly teach that supernatural gifts have ceased. A good argument can be made for such a reading; indeed, I think the case for cessationism is convincing. . . . Still, we must admit there are some solid

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Apostolic Healings/Miracles: Acts 4:8 (cf. 3:1–4:10) (87).

Non-Apostolic Healings/Miracles: Acts 8:15, 17 (cf. 8:9–24) (90).

[108] Andrew Wilson offers a gracious polemic against Cessationism. Within the context of discussing the relationship between positive New Testament commandments to exercise the sign gifts of the Holy Spirit and their New Covenant perpetuity, he contends that "the burden of proof should always be on the person who says we don't have to obey an apostolic instruction, rather than on the person who says we do." Andrew Wilson, *Spirit and Sacrament: An Invitation to Eucharismatic Worship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 108. N96 of this chap. in the thesis cites an esteemed New Testament scholar who largely echoes this sentiment; namely, there are viable exegetical and theological reasons for believing that the sign gifts of the Holy Spirit remain (and have remained) in operation. Thus, a winsome humility is indispensable when contesting doctrinal and practical arguments for/against Cessationism and Continuationism.

[109] Carson and Schreiner have been selected to show how biblical interpreters who are extensively like-minded in other areas can, and do, deviate on the subject of how the sign gifts of the Holy Spirit should be perceived after the first century AD. Aside from their similar eminence throughout the broader realm of American Evangelicalism, they share ample doctrinal commonality by virtue of being Credobaptistic and Calvinistic New Testament scholars. Nevertheless, they can candidly and charitably part ways when teasing out their positions on the practical outworkings of spiritual gifts.

[110] Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 239–40. In conjunction with Carson's comments on this matter, at least two additional observations are worthy of attention: (1) a broad consideration of Carson's book-length treatment of the spiritual gifts, coupled with a narrow analysis of Carson's statements in the cited excerpt, would indicate that they could be expanded beyond tongues to encapsulate all sign gifts; (2) Carson does not see a continuation of the gift of apostleship. His reasoning for this latter point is "not because it is a peculiar χάρισμα (*charisma*), but on the ground that this gift is so bound up with the personal acquaintance of the resurrected Lord, in his resurrection body (and for the Twelve further bound up with knowing Jesus in the days of his flesh), that it cannot be thought to continue" (240n78).

> arguments on the other side as well. For example, a good case for the continuation of the gifts until Jesus' second coming can be made from 1 Corinthians 13:8–12.[111]

Inasmuch as Carson and Schreiner are correct in their assessments of how the New Testament depicts the relationship between Christians and spiritual giftedness, it may seem superfluous to speak on the issue at greater length.[112] Some may even suggest that it is an unprofitable or unwise use of time to contemplate the nature of spiritual gifts after the apostolic age since the Bible does not *explicitly* teach any change of experience thereafter. Since Scripture assumes their continuity, so this argument goes, believers should likewise do the same.[113] However, the lack of an explicit teaching in Scripture does not mean that the Word of God is utterly silent on a particular subject.[114] Christians have often had to

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[111] While the block quote associated with this footnote was extracted from Michael L. Brown, *Authentic Fire: A Response to John MacArthur's Strange Fire* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 2015), 170, the original resource from which this excerpt comes is Thomas Schreiner, "Strange Fire," The Gospel Coalition, October 28, 2013, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/strange-fire/. Despite wholeheartedly championing a Cessationist understanding of Pneumatology, Schreiner epitomizes the winsome humility previously commended in n93 of this chap. in the thesis. This virtue is seen through Schreiner's dedication to Wayne Grudem, John Piper, and Sam Storms in Schreiner's *Spiritual Gifts*—to men who he deems "beloved friends and coworkers in the gospel of Christ" despite being of a Continuationist persuasion.

[112] It would be tempting to draw a similar conclusion when surveying the observations set forth by Gregg R. Allison, who notes how Cessationists and Continuationists alike will appeal to similar New Testament passages that they deem as proof for their respective interpretation, in supplementation to miscellaneous "evidences" from church history. Gregg R. Allison, *50 Core Truths of the Christian Faith: A Guide to Understanding and Teaching Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 196–97. For some Christians, it may appear that the Cessationist-Continuationist divide is an irresolvable stalemate between brothers and sisters in Christ. Nevertheless, as this thesis has continued to argue, it is always worth striving for doctrinal clarity because God calls his people to worship him in truth (e.g., John 4:24) and God is never the author of confusion (e.g., 1 Cor 14:33).

[113] At several points in *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit*, Jack Deere scoffs at the notion that—on the basis of the biblical evidence alone—one could argue for the sign gifts of the Holy Spirit ceasing after the first century AD. Two corroborating and related samples from Deere will suffice to corroborate this element of his perspective: "If you were to lock a brand-new Christian in a room with a Bible and tell him to study what the Scriptures have to say about healing and miracles, he would never come out of the room a cessationist." Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit: Discovering How God Speaks and Heals Today* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 54. He also writes, "No one ever just picked up the Bible, started reading, and then came to the conclusion that God was not doing signs and wonders anymore and that the gifts of the Holy Spirit had passed away. The doctrine of cessationism did not originate from a careful study of the Scriptures. The doctrine of cessationism originated in *experience*" (99).

[114] The *Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689)* employs a distinction between what "is either explicitly stated or by necessary inference contained in the Holy Scriptures." "Chapter 1—The Holy Scriptures," Founders Ministries, accessed September 12, 2023, para. 6, https://founders.org/library/

codify doctrines and practices from coalescing a multitude of biblical texts and evaluating how they should be harmonized together.[115] Therefore, in keeping with what this chapter has already noted about the normative nature of God's special revelation to man—and the normative function of God's prophets and apostles—a similar approach will now be employed to ascertain how Christians should consider prophecy under the New Covenant.[116]

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chapter-1-the-holy-scriptures/. This antecedent language is intended to safeguard the certitude that a teaching from God's Word is equally authoritative inasmuch as it can be derived from an explicit chapter and verse, or if it can be derived from a proper understanding of a plurality of texts harmonized together. Robert P. Martin extends incisive feedback on the explicitly stated/necessary inference categories:

> Not content with a mere blanket statement concerning the Bible's adequacy as a rule of faith and life, the Confession states that in the Bible, all that we need to know may be found in one of two ways—either by reading what is expressly written [i.e., explicitly stated], taking the Bible's statements in the sense in which they were intended by the original authors, or by deducing from the Bible's statements those truths which must follow logically, i.e., which are "necessarily contained [i.e., necessary inference] in the Holy Scripture." . . . For example, the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ apart from the merit of our works is expressed clearly, in words incapable of being misunderstood by any who come to the Bible with an unprejudiced mind (cf. Rom. 3:20, 28). The doctrine of the Trinity, however, is not expressly stated in the Bible; nevertheless it is true because it follows unavoidably from clear statements that the Bible makes about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. (Robert P. Martin, "The Second London Confession on the Doctrine of Scripture (Part 4)," in *In Service to the Church: Essays in Honor of Dr. Robert Paul Martin*, ed. Brian Borgman (Conway, AR: Free Grace, 2020), 423–24)

[115] This is a principle theologians have historically regarded as the *analogy of faith*: that doctrinal or practical convictions can be reached on the basis of interpreting Scripture with Scripture *in the event* that there are either no clear chapter and verse prooftexts on a particular issue, or if chapter and verse prooftexts are not entirely clear. Andy Naselli unpacks the central underpinnings of the *analogy of faith*:

> *Let Scripture Interpret Scripture*. Follow this syllogism:
>
> - Major premise: God is entirely truthful—without error and incapable of error.
> - Minor premise: The Bible is God-breathed.
> - Conclusion: Therefore, the Bible is entirely truthful—without error and incapable of error.
>
> This means that the Bible does not contradict itself. So a sound principle is that we should interpret less clear passages in light of more clear passages. We shouldn't zoom in on just one text and interpret it without reference to the rest of the Bible. That's what heretics do. For example, I'm not 100 percent sure what "being baptized on behalf of the dead" refers to in 1 Corinthians 15:29, but based on other Scripture I can rule out what it certainly does *not* mean. We must interpret the unclear [passages of Scripture] in light of what is more clear. (Andy Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2017], 16–17)

[116] In keeping with what is delineated throughout the previous footnote, the subsequent material cannot be simplified to a single verse of Scripture or to a single passage of Scripture. Arguments for the cessation of normative post-apostolic revelation must be developed on the basis of interpreting various biblical texts in light of one another and allowing certain conclusions to organically build off one another.

Although the New Testament clearly distinguishes the spiritual gift of prophecy from the spiritual gift of apostle (1 Cor 12:28–31)—in addition to clearly distinguishing the office of prophet from the office of apostle (Eph 4:11)—both of these gifts and offices are closely associated with one another.[117] As those who Christ tasked with establishing the foundation of the church age (Eph 2:19–20), the first century apostles and prophets would foretell and forthtell divine truth to the people of God; the prophets operating under the ecclesiastical authority of the apostles (1 Cor 14:26–33).[118] Given this close connection between the apostles and the prophets of the early church, it is interesting to note how some will advocate for the cessation of the former and the continuation of the latter in subsequent generations of history.[119] However, based on what can be seen from

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To be sure, such a viewpoint represents precisely what the *Second London Baptist Confession of Faith* means by the phrase "necessary inference" (see n99 of this chap.).

[117] It is prudent to make two supplemental comments regarding the ideas expressed in the sentence corresponding with this footnote. First, this thesis assumes a distinction between *big-A apostles* and *small-a apostles*. *Big-A apostles* refer to the eleven original disciples of Jesus (minus Judas Iscariot), Matthias, and the apostle Paul; *small-a apostles* refer to certain individuals throughout the New Testament who are called "apostle," but are differentiated from the previously cited men (e.g., Barnabas in Acts 14:14; Andronicus and Junias in Rom 16:7; Titus in 2 Cor. 8:23; Epaphroditus in Phil 2:25). Costi W. Hinn underscores that the Greek term for apostle simply means "messenger," and can be used for the purpose of describing a believer who is engaging in Christian ministry/missionary endeavors. Costi W. Hinn, *Knowing the Spirit: Who He Is, What He Does, and How He Can Transform Your Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2023), 243. When viewed through this lens, one could note that any Christian who is sent out as a messenger or a missionary can fit the label of *small-a apostle*, while remaining distinct from the limited number of individuals who are regarded as *Big-A apostles*. Second, the terms "gift" and "office" are both used interchangeably for apostles and prophets. The reasoning behind this utilization is that the New Testament portrays "apostle" and "prophet" as distinct offices *in* the church, and as distinct spiritual gifts *for* the church. Harold W. Hoehner goes into greater detail on this subject in *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 539.

[118] The fact that there are apostolic instructions contained in the New Testament for *how* prophecy should be conducted in the local church is evidence that first century prophets were under the authority of the apostles. Douglas Judisch contends, "The only means of distributing the prophetic gifts in the New Testament era was the apostolate, so that once the last apostle died, no more prophetic gifts were available." Douglas Judisch, *An Evaluation of Claims to the Charismatic Gifts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 33. Judisch reaches his conclusion on the basis of his interpretation of Acts 8:14–20, 1 Cor 12:12, and Heb 2:3–4. Regardless of whether one agrees with every detail of how Judisch understands the aforesaid texts, it is clear that at least *some* measure of apostolic oversight was involved when the sign gifts were bestowed upon believers (including that of prophecy).

[119] As noted previously, Carson is a capable example of arguing for the cessation of apostleship after the first century AD, but sees no exegetical or theological grounds to preclude the cessation of

Scripture, there are noteworthy grounds for seeing the cessation of the spiritual gift of apostle as a catalyst for the cessation of the spiritual gift of prophecy:

1. Every apostle was an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:22; 10:39–41; 1 Cor 9:1; 15:7–8).

2. Every apostle was directly appointed by Christ (Mark 3:14; Luke 6:12–16; Acts 1:2, 24–26; 10:41; Gal 1:11–17).

3. Every apostle was able to perform indisputable signs and wonders (Matt 10:2; Acts 2:43; 4:33; 5:12; 8:14; Rom 15:19; 2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:4).

4. Every apostle was confirmed by the other apostles (Acts 1:15–26; Gal 2:7–9; 2 Pet 3:15–16).[120]

Many who argue for the cessation of apostleship would note how it is impossible for any Christian to meet each of the preceding qualifications after the first century.[121]

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prophecy in subsequent generations of church history: Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 239–40. However, Sam Storms is a well-known Continuationist who struggles to affirm a complete cessation of either apostleship or prophecy after the first century (although he does seem to concede a cessation of normative apostolic authority in the years posterior to 100 AD). Storms remarks,

> Nothing in the qualifications for being an apostle require that we limit its validity to the first century. Nowhere else in the New Testament is the apostolate said to be restricted to the early church. It is, of course, undeniably the case that certain expressions of apostolic ministry, such as the authority granted to some to lay the theological and ethical foundations for the church universal, were necessarily time bound. But once the apostles ceased to function in this capacity does not mean they ceased to function in a variety of others (Storms, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, 314)

[120] The following enumerated qualifications for being an apostle were collated as a result of consulting the following resources: Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost*, 89–93; Pennington, *A Biblical Case for Cessationism*, 63–68; Robertson, *The Final Word*, 79–81; Waldron, *To Be Continued?*, 25–32.

[121] John F. MacArthur goes beyond what is listed in the body of this thesis by identifying six biblically derived qualifications for the office of apostle, and he contends that each of them are criteria that cannot be met or extended after their death in the first century AD. First, "The church was founded upon the apostles": "[Ephesians 2:20] clearly teaches that the apostles were appointed to be the foundation of the church. That is, their role was to give grounding, support, direction—to provide the underpinning for a fledging church. They were the church's founders. That role was fulfilled by them and by definition can never be repeated." John F. MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 148. Second, "Apostles were eyewitnesses to the resurrection":

> In the case of the biblical appearances of our risen Lord, it is clear that he appeared only a few times, usually to a group of people, such as the disciples in the upper room. . . . The *only* exception (cf. 1 Cor. 15:8) was his appearance to Paul, who saw Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1–9). Even then, Paul was accompanied by others who saw the bright light and were aware that he had been struck blind in an undeniably supernatural experience. That was a post-ascension appearance of Christ. He later appeared to Paul on two other occasions (Acts 18:9; 23:11). (148–49)

Third, "Apostles were chosen personally by Jesus Christ": "The original twelve (with Matthias later replacing Judas) plus Paul had a nontransferable commission to reveal doctrine and found the church.

The deaths of the eleven, Matthias, and Paul—coupled with the imagery of the apostles being foundational to the church age (e.g., Eph 2:20)—are frequently cited arguments for why there has not been apostles for the past 1,900 years.[122] What is more, it is apparent that the cessation of New Covenant documents coincided with the death of the apostles.[123] The lack of an expanding New Testament canon is tethered to the lack of Christ-appointed individuals (i.e., apostles) to oversee and produce new written instruction under the New

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When the pastoral epistles set forth principles for lasting church leadership, they speak of elders and deacons. They never mention apostles" (149–50). Fourth, (4) "Apostles were authenticated by miraculous signs": "No such miracles were ever performed—even in the apostolic era—by anyone other than the apostles and those commissioned by them" (150). Fifth, "Apostles had absolute authority": "The apostles had much more authority than other prophets, whose utterances had to be judged as to their accuracy and authenticity (see, for example, 1 Cor. 14:29–33). When the apostles spoke, there was no discussion. They were already recognized as the revelatory agents of God" (150). Sixth, "Apostles have an eternal and unique place of honor":

> The names of the twelve apostles are sealed forever into the wall of the New Jerusalem in heaven. (Theologians can argue whether the twelfth spot should go to Paul or Matthias or possibly to both.) Their names are unique; their office is unique; their ministry is unique; the miracles they did are unique. The apostles were unquestionably a special breed; they had no successors. The age of the apostles and what they did is forever in the past. (151)

[122] A sample of this line of reasoning is encapsulated by Michael Horton:

> The apostles had no successors. To them belonged an extraordinary ministry for an extraordinary period of the church. It was the foundation-laying era (1 Cor. 3:1; Eph. 2:20) followed by the ordinary ministry of the pastors and teachers (2 Tim. 2:2). The apostles speak with magisterial authority directly from Christ himself, but they instruct the ordinary pastors who follow in their wake to receive and guard the deposit of truth rather than to add to it (1 Tim. 6:20). Just as there is no mention of "one pastor" in the lists for catholic unity, there is no mention in the New Testament of a continuing apostolic office (Michael Horton, "The Church," in *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016], 333)

[123] It is simply a historically attested fact of Christian orthodoxy that the canon has been perceived as closed for roughly two millennia. To substantiate how the earliest Christians regarded the canon of Scripture as closed after the death of the apostles, Everett Ferguson uncovers a compelling piece of historical evidence:

> A shorthand expression for the authorities recognized by Christians was "prophets and apostles," it being understood that the Lord's authority stood behind both. This appears already in 2 Pet. 3:2, "Remember the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets, and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken through your apostles." It serves as a summary of the scriptures read in church, according to Justin, *1 Apol.* 67.3 (cf. *Dial*. 119.6). In the *Muratorian Fragment*, lines 77–78, the *Shepherd* was excluded from public reading because it did not belong to either of these categories (Everett Ferguson, "Factors Leading to the Selection and Closure of the New Testament Canon," in *The Canon Debate*, ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019], 306–7)

Covenant.[124] Thus, with the New Covenant being the consummate covenant in redemptive history—and with the New Testament being the conclusive documents affixed to the New Covenant epoch—the origination of new *canonical* revelation has ceased.[125]

However, does a lack of post-apostolic *canonical* revelation necessitate a lack of *normative* post-apostolic revelation altogether?[126] Despite the absence of apostolic

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[124] Once again, Michael J. Kruger postulates an immensely incisive perspective regarding how the advancement of canonical revelation was impossible without the presence of apostles; in other words, no apostles, no New Testament. Kruger fleshes these musings out:

> What would happen if the early Christians believed that the authoritative message of the apostles were put in written form? How would such documents be viewed? Initially, of course, the apostles delivered their message orally through teaching and preaching. But it was not long before they (and others) began to write their message down (e.g., 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:14). . . . It is here that we see the obvious connection between the role of the apostles and the beginnings of the canon. If apostles were viewed as the mouthpiece of Christ, and it was believed that they wrote down that apostolic message in books, then those books would be received as the very words of Christ himself. Such writings would not have to wait until second-, third-, or fourth-century ecclesiastical decisions to be viewed as authoritative—instead they would be viewed as authoritative from almost the very start. For this reason, a written New Testament was not something the church formally "decided" to have at some later date, but was instead the natural outworking of the early church's view of the function of the apostles. (Michael J. Kruger, *The Question of Canon: Challenging the Status Quo in the New Testament Debate* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013], 69–70)

[125] Charles L. Quarles and L. Scott Kellum tease out the inextricable connection between the finality of the New Covenant—and by extension—the finality of the New Covenant documents (i.e., New Testament):

> The lack of such recognized apostolic authority made the production of new Scriptures impossible in the early church. Respected and orthodox works like *Hermas* were expressly rejected for their nonapostolic origins. In this environment, it seems impossible to suggest an adjustment to the canon is possible. . . . The inauguration of the new covenant was a significant impetus for recognizing contemporary works as Scripture. . . . But more than just describing the impetus of the canon, [the inauguration of the new covenant] would also be a large part of affirming the canon is closed. . . . The new covenant extends to the final state of humanity. What justification is there for a newer covenant within the boundaries of the present covenant? One might argue that the situation is like that of the Sinai and Abrahamic covenants, where the former works within the latter. However, both were pointing to and fulfilled in Christ. What similar situation could work within the parameters of the new covenant? Without prior notice and theological warrant, no basis exists for a revised new covenant. Therefore, there is no basis for new Scriptures. (Charles L. Quarles and L. Scott Kellum, *40 Questions about the Text and Canon of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2023], 321–22)

[126] In the late 1990s, an academic debate amongst Presbyterian scholars centered around this particular question; namely, does God still provide *normative* special revelation to his people *apart from* the Scriptures themselves? An analysis of this debate—and an analysis of a Presbyterian perspective on this question that will closely mirror the arguments set forth at this juncture of the thesis—can be attained via the following article: Garnet H. Milne, "'Private Spirits' in the 'Westminster Confession of Faith' and in Protestant-Catholic Debates: A Response to Byron Curtis," *Westminster Theological Journal* 61, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 101–10.

oversight, is it not possible for Christians to continue exercising the gift of prophecy in a similar way to pastors exercising the gift of teaching?[127] While faithful Christians have disagreed on this point over the centuries, it appears that the cessation of post-apostolic *canonical* revelation would go hand in hand with any form of *normative* post-apostolic revelation.[128] Whether speaking of what can be found in the biblical canon, or speaking of

[127] At a popular level, it is not uncommon to hear justification for (1) the fallibility of New Testament prophecy and (2) the continuation of New Testament prophecy beyond the apostolic era of church history by likening it to the spiritual gift of teaching. An example of the aforementioned line of reasoning is exemplified by John Piper, who is arguably the most prominent Continuationist throughout conservative evangelical circles in America:

> [Prophecy] is still valid and useful for the church today. This is the clear implication of 1 Corinthians 13:8–12 and Acts 2:17–18. [Prophecy] is a Spirit-prompted, Spirit-sustained, utterance that is rooted in a true revelation (1 Corinthians 14:30), but is fallible because the prophet's perception of the revelation, and thinking about the revelation, and report of the revelation are all fallible. It is thus similar to the gift of teaching which is Spirit-prompted, Spirit-sustained, rooted in an infallible revelation (the Bible) and yet is fallible but very useful to the church. [Prophecy] does not have an authority that is on a par with Scripture, for Scripture is verbally inspired, not just Spirit-prompted and Spirit-sustained. The very words of the biblical writers are the words of God (1 Corinthians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16). This is not true of the words that come from the "gift of prophecy." The New Testament gift of prophecy is a "third category" of prophetic utterance between the categories of 1) verbally inspired, intrinsically authoritative, infallible speech spoken by the likes of Moses, Jesus, and the apostles; and 2) the speech of false prophets spoken presumptuously, without inspiration and liable to condemnation (Deuteronomy 18:20). Those two categories (absolutely infallible vs. false) do not exhaust all the biblical teaching on prophecy. (John Piper, "The New Testament Gift of Prophecy: Definition, Theses, and Suggestions," Desiring God, March 26, 1990, https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-new-testament-gift-of-prophecy)

[128] Providentially speaking, it is difficult to perceive of any purported revelation as *normative* for Christians who live centuries beyond the solidification of the biblical canon. Even in the scenario that an individual received a genuine revelation from God in the post-apostolic era of church history, it could never be normative for the universal people of God by virtue of the personal, unfalsifiable, and non-canonical nature of such a revelation. Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley offer a synonymous viewpoint regarding the fundamental relationship between *canonical* revelation and *normative* revelation:

> We do not find the New Testament reporting or encouraging prophecy that directs the average John or Mary for personal decisions or ministry, or that guides a church in how to order its ordinary practices. God used prophecy to establish the church in its early new covenant administration with the freshly revealed truths of Christ's finished work, the Gentile mission spearheaded by Paul, and the full inclusion of believing Gentiles with the Jews as God's spiritual temple on earth. Aspects of those prophecies were directed to specific needs and occasions, but they communicated and reinforced important revelations of God's covenantal purposes in Christ—just like the New Testament Epistles, which are both occasional and doctrinal. We conclude that the New Testament prophets shared the foundational ministry of the apostles as the bearers of new revelation from God concerning Christ and his people. Paul's teaching on prophets help to account for the inclusion in the New Testament of books written by people who were not apostles, such as Mark, Luke, and Jude, but whose words were inspired by the Spirit to become part of the Holy Scriptures. It also implies that when the apostles completed their foundational mission and died, the prophets likewise passed from the church. The foundation was laid, the New Testament was written, and now we build upon it (Joel R. Beeke and

God directly providing instruction to man (i.e., outside of the biblical canon), both sources of special revelation must be perceived as *normative.*[129] Since the content of special revelation is a coherent unit of truth, everything God chooses to disclose to human beings will possess an equal measure of authority.[130]

Furthermore, while it is certainly true that divinely appointed apostles and prophets would have shared an abundance of authoritative instruction not recorded in Scripture, everything that the Holy Spirit led those individuals to declare was consistent with what God chose to preserve in the biblical canon.[131] Stated differently, no special

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Paul M. Smalley, *Revelation and God*, vol. 1 of *Reformed Systematic Theology* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019], 441)

[129] Regardless of being recorded in the biblical canon or being directly communicated to man via a separate medium, all doctrinal and practical instruction from God is *normative* because of the supreme authority that he embodies as the Creator of all things. David K. Clark highlights this reality:

> As evangelical Protestants, we agree with all traditional Christians that the ultimate authority for Christian believing is the triune God himself. . . . In the context of Christian theology and life, God rightly exercises moral authority over all creation and, therefore, more specifically, over human persons. We ought to obey God's will, and God properly expects this obedience. . . . God does rightly exercise moral authority. What God commands, I should do. In addition, for theology, God's status as the all-knowing Creator gives him not just moral license to require my obedience to what is good, but also intellectual right to command my assent to what is true. (David K. Clark, *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010], 60–62)

[130] Within the broader context of identifying eight explicit distinctives of how God's special revelation can be perceived as truthful, Steven L. Lawson helpfully underscores how all truth stands together as a comprehensive unity:

> All truth is one system of revealed reality. Every piece of truth perfectly fits together into one body of divinity. Truth never contradicts itself. Truth is never at odds with itself. Truth never speaks out of both sides of its mouth. Truth is never canceled out by another truth claim. What God says to one person is what He says to everyone else. Truth is never true for one person, but not true for someone else. Truth is always truth for every individual. . . . [Special revelation] always speaks with one voice, as it is always presenting one self-consistent worldview. (Steven L. Lawson, *The Moment of Truth* [Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2018], 11–12)

[131] Given the theological framework undergirding this thesis, it is appropriate to direct the reader to chap. 1of the *Second London Baptist Confession of Faith* (especially para. 6) for a Particular Baptistic delineation of Scripture's sufficiency. Additionally, W. R. Downing provides a Particular Baptistic commentary on the sufficiency of Scripture:

> Man, as the image-bearer of God was created as a creature of faith because, first, every fact is a created fact, and second, because the source of truth and knowledge was external to himself, i.e., his faith was to be placed in the Word of God. . . . [Thus] Christians are to have a "revelational epistemology. . . . Although the Scriptures do not reveal everything (Deut. 29:29), their revelation is sufficient for our knowledge, obedience and expectation. To go beyond the Scriptures in matters undisclosed to us is

revelation has ever contradicted or transcended what God eternally purposed to materialize in the Old and New Testaments.[132] Even in the event that *normative* revelation was to be given in post-apostolic eras of church history, the substance of such revelation would merely be a reiteration of the doctrinal and practical instruction already encapsulated in God's written Word.[133] Thus, J. I. Packer's popularized adage seems true with respect to *any* notion of special revelation being received outside of the Bible: "If private revelations agree with Scripture, they are needless, and if they disagree, they are false."[134]

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speculation. (W. R. Downing, *A Baptist Catechism with Commentary: An Introductory Study of Bible Doctrine in the Form of a Catechism with Commentary* [Dublin, CA: FirstLove, 2008], 44)

[132] Although the canon of Scripture is by no means an exhaustive assortment of everything that God has ever spoken to man, nor is it an exhaustive array of everything that God's appointed spokesmen has ever communicated by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the canon of Scripture is nonetheless consistent with the totality of special revelation that has been provided throughout redemptive history. This paramount principle is helpfully alluded to by Stephen J. Wellum: "God's people, whether Israel or the church, never existed apart from God's authoritative word, although over time, lists eventually delineated a specific collection of inspired books, something God's people *recognized* from the very beginning of their existence." (Stephen J. Wellum, *From Canon to Concept*, vol. 1 of *Systematic Theology* (Brentwood, TN: B & H, 2024), 366.

[133] This sentence points to a hypothetical scenario for the purpose of emphasizing the *completed sufficiency* of Scripture in relationship to all forms of normative special revelation that God could conceivably dispense to mankind. Heath Lambert uses the terminology *completed sufficiency* of Scripture to highlight, "Though God was adding to the Bible over millennia, the text of Scripture that we now recognize is completely sufficient. We are not waiting for any more additions to the canon to have a sufficient text. . . . We do not need to wait for any more authoritative words from God about how to live our lives." Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 46–47. If Lambert's analysis of the *completed sufficiency* of Scripture is correct, then any purported normative special revelation in the New Covenant epoch of redemptive history could not go beyond what God has already been pleased to encapsulate in the biblical canon. In the event that God provided *normative* post-apostolic revelation that expanded or supplemented what was already transcribed in Scripture, then his written Word could not properly be regarded as *completely sufficient*; the existence of *normative* post-apostolic revelation that transcends what is already found in the Bible would thereby negate the Bible's *completed sufficiency*. On this point, it is interesting that Lambert likewise acknowledges that *completed sufficiency* "is also embraced by continuationists who, though they believe in the ongoing gift of prophecy, argue that the prophecy today is of a different variety than the authoritative type that we have in the Old Testament" (46). For a more expansive treatment of the *completed sufficiency* of Scripture, see John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2010), 225–28.

[134] J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 86. Although this pithy excerpt has ordinarily been attributed to John Owen, it is actually Packer's summarization of Owen's convictions regarding the cessation of *normative* post-apostolic revelation. Packer continues,

> Once the Scriptures were written, and the prophetic and apostolic witness to Christ was complete, no need remained for private revelations of new truths, and Owen did not believe that any were given.

Of course, the contention for a lack of *normative* post-apostolic revelation does not imply that the triune God has become any less active in the affairs of redemptive history than in preceding generations.[135] Until the end of this age, believers and unbelievers alike will still experience extraordinary acts of providence in their lives.[136] The Holy Spirit

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> He opposed the "enthusiasm" of those who, like the Quakers, put their trust in supposed revelations given apart from, and going beyond, the word. In a Latin work Owen calls the Quakers *fanatici*, "fanatics," for their attitude. He is quick to deploy against them the old dilemma that if their 'private revelations' agree with Scripture, they are needless, and if they disagree, they are false. In all this, Owen is following the beaten track of Reformed exposition from Calvin onward, and there is nothing novel in any of the points that he makes. (86)

[135] Affirming the cessation of *normative* post-apostolic revelation does not necessitate seeing God as completely disengaged from the affairs that transpire throughout the universe. At a very practical level, Packer explicates how New Covenant Christians should regard the sovereign Creator's involvement in their lives:

> The idea of a life in which the inward voice of the Spirit decides and directs everything sounds most attractive, for it seems to exalt the Spirit's ministry and to promise the closest intimacy with God; but in practice this quest for superspirituality leads only to frantic bewilderment or lunacy. . . . The fundamental mode whereby our rational Creator guides his rational creatures is by rational understanding and application of his written Word. . . . The true way to honor the Holy Spirit as our guide is to honor the holy Scriptures through which he guides us. The fundamental guidance which God gives to shape our lives—the instilling, that is, of the basic convictions, attitudes, ideals and value judgments, in terms of which we are to live—is not a matter of inward promptings apart from the Word but of the pressure on our consciences of the portrayal of God's character and will in the Word, which the Spirit enlightens us to understand and apply to ourselves. (J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993], 235–36)

[136] Admittedly, many circumstances and events occur in redemptive history that finite man is not able to explain. A viable way of referring to the antecedently referenced matters is to employ the designation "extraordinary acts of providence," which is a modification of the language utilized in chap. 5 of the *Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689)*: "In his ordinary providence, God makes use of means, though he is free to work apart from them, beyond them, and contrary to them at his pleasure." "Chapter 5—Divine Providence," Founders Ministries, accessed March 20, 2024, chap. 5 and para. 3, https://founders.org/library/chapter-5-divine-providence/. Vern S. Poythress provides a sampling of what would constitute extraordinary acts of providence:

> During a sermon Charles H. Spurgeon "pointed to the gallery and said, 'Young man, the gloves in your pocket are not paid for.' On another occasion Spurgeon said, 'There is a man sitting there who is a shoemaker; he keeps his shop open on Sundays; it was open last Sabbath morning. He took ninepence, and there was fourpence profit on it: his soul is sold to Satan for fourpence." A woman in Switzerland saw a vision of a lecture hall in Essex, in which Os Guinness was about to lecture. A strange girl was about to disrupt the meeting. All these are cases of circumstantial content obtained through nondiscursive processes [i.e., extraordinary acts of providence]. (Vern S. Poythress, "Modern Spiritual Gifts as Analogous to Apostolic Gifts: Affirming Extraordinary Works of the Spirit within Cessationist Theology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39, no. 1 [March 1996]: 85)

After sharing these verified events from human history, Poythress proceeds to note that while these are legitimate cases of "nondiscursive processes" (i.e., extraordinary acts of providence), it would be wrong to confuse involvement of God in those matters with full divine (i.e., *normative*) authority: "The crucial error . . .

will continue to subjectively convict, lead, and prompt individuals in ways that are often uniquely specific to their season of life.[137] There will also be a distinctively prophetic dimension to the New Covenant epoch insofar Christians rightly forthtell the testimony of Scripture inside and outside of the pulpit.[138] Nevertheless, the only source of *normative* special revelation that remains for the people of God is contained in the documents affirmed and authored by the apostles of Jesus Christ.[139] Just as first century believers

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is to confuse involvement of God with full divine authority in the product. God is in a sense directly involved in the growth of grass and blowing breezes: 'He makes grass grow for the cattle' (Ps. 104:14). But growing grass is not inspired" (86). When reflecting on Poythress's vantage point against the backdrop of what is documented in chap. 5 of the *Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689)*, it is the persuasion of this thesis that (1) it is appropriate and necessary to distinguish extraordinary acts of providence from *normative* post-apostolic revelation; and (2) it is appropriate and necessary to affirm that the cessation of *normative* post-apostolic revelation does not equate to the cessation of God doing whatsoever he pleases within creation to accomplish his eternal purposes (Ps 115:3; Eph 1:11).

[137] It is no secret that Arthur W. Pink (1886–1952) was a Cessationist, entailing his rejection of any notion of *normative* post-apostolic revelation. He expresses, "God has now fully revealed His mind to us: all that we need to 'thoroughly furnish' us 'unto all good works' is already in our hands! Personally the writer would not take the trouble to walk into the next room to hear any person deliver a message which he claimed was inspired by the Holy Spirit; with the completed Scriptures in our possession, nothing more is required except for the Spirit to interpret and apply them." Arthur W. Pink, *The Holy Spirit* (Gearhart, OR: Watchmaker, 2016), 47. However, despite making these assertions, Pink goes on to devote extensive space to detailing how the Holy Spirit is intimately involved in the life of New Covenant believers. Pink highlights the following ways—among others—in which the Holy Spirit operates in human life: Regeneration (55–60), illumination (68–73), conviction (74–79), comforting believers (80–86), effectual calling (87–92), uniting believers to Christ (96–98), indwelling believers (99–104), assuring believers of salvation (125–31), interceding for believers (151–57), and sanctifying believers (158–70). Thus, a belief in the cessation of *normative* post-apostolic revelation does not preclude the cessation of the Holy Spirit's work in the lives of New Covenant believers, or in the post-first century world at large.

[138] While this chapter has argued for the cessation of the *foretelling* dimension of the spiritual gift of prophecy, it is still appropriate to affirm the continuation of the *forthtelling* dimension of prophecy insofar divine truth is rightly proclaimed from Scripture. In this respect, a robustly biblical ministry in the post-apostolic era of New Covenant history can still be characterized as *prophetic* (i.e., when the written word of God is declared without error). For a more elaborate treatment of this distinction, see John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians*, *MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 302–4.

[139] In his foreword to O. Palmer Robertson's *Christ of the Consummation*, Richard B. Gaffin Jr. traces how the apostles were Christ's appointed representatives, affirming the authority of the Old Testament and authoring what would become the New Testament. Consequently, the written corpus produced by the apostles carry the same authority of Christ himself, and is thereby *normative* for the remainder of church history. Gaffin writes,

> [The history of redemption] begins with the fall and, as it unfolds, largely incorporates the history of Israel, God's old covenant people, until it reaches its completion in the person and work of Christ, his incarnate Son. The God-breathed documents of Scripture—each originating at a different time over the course of this history—provide a sufficient and the only infallible record of this history. . . . Christ is

were held accountable to champion and embrace the supreme authority affixed to these oracles of divine truth, so also does this expectation endure throughout every subsequent era.[140]

Conclusion

Up to this point in the thesis, a biblical and theological understanding of how man relates to God has been crystallized. Chapter 2 noted the centrality of covenant for man's eschatological relationship with God, and chapter 3 identified the biblical canon as the written culmination of God's covenantal dealings with humanity. Given the finality of the New Covenant and the closed nature of the biblical canon, this chapter established how divine image bearers should respond to the notion of continued *normative* post-apostolic revelation. Since God's provision of *normative* New Covenant revelation was directly tethered to the *normative* function of first century apostles and prophets, the discontinued existence of their respective offices necessitates a cessation of *normative*

> in view as both the end point and the final goal of the history of revelation. . . . God's revelation in his Son—in his incarnate person and work, both his deed-revelation and his Word-revelation—has a finality that cannot be superseded or surpassed. Christ consummates as he closes the history of special redemptive revelation. This final, last-days speech in the Son, the "great salvation . . . declared at first by the Lord," includes its accompanying revelatory attestation "by those who heard" (Heb. 2:3). This attestation is plausibly understood as the ear (and eye) witness of the apostles. It is the witness authorized by Christ himself (e.g., Acts 1:8; cf. vv. 2, 21–22), such that their words and those of others associated with them in the foundational period of the church (cf. Eph. 2:20) are his very own words (e.g., 1 Cor. 14:36–37; 1 Thess. 2:13). With the emergence of the New Testament canon the eventual result. (Richard B. Gaffin Jr., foreword to *The Testimony of the Four Gospels*, vol. 1 of *Christ of the Consummation* by O. Palmer Robertson [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2022], xxiv)

[140] Just as all Christians in the first century—regardless of role—were ultimately bound to the authority of Scripture, so also are every generation of Christians until the Last Day. René Pache develops this biblically derived argument:

> What more can we say except that the authority of the written Word, reinforced by all the authority of the incarnate Word, cannot be broken (John 10:35). . . . Entirely submitted to the Scriptures, both the Old Testament and the New, the apostles were to be above all else mouthpieces of the Lord, charged with confirming and finishing the written revelation by presenting Christ to the world and to the church. Servants of God throughout all the succeeding generations, being neither eyewitnesses of the resurrection nor authors of the sacred books, have been obliged to carry out their role in the church in submission to the revelation. . . . It is clear that the sovereignty of the Lord is exerted in the church by the authority of the Scriptures in conjunction with that of the Spirit. (René Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* [Chicago: Moody, 1969], 306–8)

revelation after the first century. In a word, the lack of future redemptive historical covenants results in a lack of additional canonical literature; the lack of additional canonical literature results in a lack of divinely appointed representatives to deliver ongoing *normative* revelation. With the aforementioned premises in mind, the final chapter of this thesis will go on to propose pertinent applications for New Covenant apologetical, evangelistic, and polemical methodologies.

CHAPTER 5

EXPLORING THE INTERSECTION OF APOLOGETICS, EVANGELISM, AND THE FINALITY OF NEW COVENANT REVELATION

It is remarkable to behold how truth can be communicated and impressed upon the human mind through the utilization of music.[1] A canvass of church history will unveil many songs that Christians have used to temper rich theology with heartfelt expressions of doxology, all for the purpose of reinforcing believers in the central tenets of Scripture.[2] While ample compositions could be cited under the broader Protestant umbrella, one striking example finds its origins in the eighteenth century. In his hymnal entitled *A Selection of Hymns, from the Best Authors, Intended to Be an Appendix to Dr. Watts' Psalms and Hymns*, John Rippon catalogs a piece that has come to be known as "How Firm a Foundation."[3] Consider the familiar words recorded in the opening stanza:

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[1] Contemporary neurological studies offer compelling support for what has been known to many by personal experience. Namely, setting content to music is a highly effective way for people to grow in their familiarity of that material. For an academic study on the relationship between knowledge retention and music, see Vinoo Alluri et al., "From Vivaldi to Beatles and Back: Predicting Lateralized Brain Responses to Music," *NeuroImage* 83 (December 2013): 627–36.

[2] Martin Luther is merely one noteworthy example of a spiritual leader who sought to use music as a means of educating and equipping Christians with the truth of God's Word. Emily A. Brubaker underscores the way Luther perceived the relationship between doxological expression and theological formulation:

> Luther wanted the people to share God's Word and truth with each other by participating in worship. Since many people were illiterate during this time, singing hymns was a means to circulate the message in a manner that did not involve reading. Thus, adding the [common] vernacular allowed for a greater audience to understand Luther's message. Luther prioritized singing in the vernacular because he claimed, "God can speak directly to the Germans only in the German language." If people could sing in their own language, then the truths could be more readily transmitted. (Emily A. Brubaker, "Music as a Means to Spread Martin Luther's Message," *Musical Offerings* 11, no. 2 [2020]: 75–76)

[3] Photocopies of a preserved original have been made available through the Princeton Theological Seminary Library. The following bibliographic citation was derived from what has been shared online. See John Rippon, *A Selection of Hymns, from the Best Authors, Intended to Be an Appendix to Dr.*

How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord,
is laid for your faith in his excellent Word!
What more can he say than to you he has said,
to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?[4]

Of the numerous observations that could be derived from this excerpt, at least three coincide with what has already been unpacked in the thesis. First, God has intentionally disclosed himself to mankind, and this is especially seen in individuals who have come to saving faith. The "saints of the Lord" are the stated recipients of "a firm foundation," and they are the stated benefactors of the "refuge" that Jesus Christ grants to hell bound sinners. Yet, whether referring to his dealings with the elect or reprobate, God always takes the initiative in revealing himself to human beings (Ezek 38:23; Heb. 1:1–3). Second, God has propositionally revealed himself with absolute trustworthiness. The mentioning of "excellent Word" indicates that God makes himself known through intelligible speech (i.e., verbal and written), and as previously noted, the all-encompassing character of divine revelation can be likened to a "firm foundation." Just as the architect can trust that an edifice on solid rock will be stable, so also can believers trust that their life will be stable when it is built upon special revelation (Ps 62:1–8; Luke 6:47–48). Third, God has ensured that the culmination of his revelatory purposes is both final and sufficient for every believer until the Last Day. Insofar the full counsel of God's "excellent Word" has been once for all provided, an unchanging standard for doctrine and practice must be recognized for Christians under the New Covenant (Isa 8:19–20; 2 Pet 1:16–21). Indeed, "what more can he say than to you he has said?"

When viewed through the lens of this illustration, the three aforementioned emphases correspond to the three preceding chapters in this thesis. Chapter 2 demonstrated that God's special revelation to man is covenantal revelation, and that God has sovereignly related to man through various covenants over the span of redemptive history; the last

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Watts' Psalms and Hymns (Sunderland, UK: Burlington, 1801), https://archive.org/details/selectionofhy1801ripp/page/n5/mode/2up.

[4] Rippon, *A Selection of Hymns, from the Best Authors*, 128.

being the New Covenant in Christ's blood.[5] Chapter 3 went on to underscore how the eventual culmination of God's covenantal revelation to man is the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, all of which authoritatively and truthfully attest to the stipulations of each respective divine-human covenant.[6] In collating these convictions, chapter 4 maintained that the present corpus of God's covenantal revelation to man—as encapsulated in the biblical canon—is complete and conclusive.[7] Thus, Scripture epitomizes the final and normative word from God to man; Scripture is the excellent and firm foundation that establishes what God's people believe, why God's people believe what they believe, and how God's people give a gracious answer for the hope that is in them (1 Pet 3:15).[8] This is the essence of a Christian's stewardship of the Great Commission mandate, and herein lies the practicality of what was gradually developed throughout the previous four chapters.[9]

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[5] Within the context of a chapter that predominantly focused upon the covenantal nature of God's special revelation to mankind, pp. 57–75 of this thesis was devoted to summarizing each of the divine-human covenants that were enacted throughout redemptive history; pp. 72–75 were specifically allotted to discussing the New Covenant (i.e., the Covenant of Grace).

[6] On the heels of explaining the historical process affixed to the formation of the Old and New Testaments, in addition to why the Apocryphal writings are not regarded as canonical by Protestants, pp. 107–16 of this thesis substantiate why God's covenantal revelation in the sixty-six book Bible can be recognized as binding and reliable for the Christian life.

[7] In light of God no longer enacting covenants with man (i.e., the New Covenant is the final redemptive-historical covenant), nor raising up representatives to delineate covenantal stipulations in subsequent canonical documents (i.e., the canon of Scripture is closed), pp. 152–61 of this thesis highlight the cessation of normative post-apostolic revelation.

[8] The notion of Scripture being the final and normative word from God to man—as well as the excellent and firm foundation for what Christians believe—is rooted in at least three core realities: (1) since it is the written Word of God, Scripture provides human beings with a divinely inspired perspective on how to perceive the world in which they live; (2) since it is the written Word of God, Scripture is to be the ultimate authority for a believer's life; (3) since it is the written Word of God, believers can have epistemological certainty about their convictions on the basis of conforming their worldview to Scripture. A more elaborate treatment of these topics is provided on pp. 78–82 of this thesis.

[9] It is outside the scope of this thesis to offer a full-orbed defense of the Great Commission's perpetual and universal application to every New Covenant believer. Nevertheless, this footnote contains a condensed case for why the Great Commission mandate extends beyond the first century context in which it was given by Christ (Matt 28:18–20). As the foundation of the church age, the apostles went on to establish visible churches throughout the first-century world. With every generation of church history, any biblical

Based on the theological groundwork that has already been laid, this chapter will offer concrete instruction on how believers should articulate and defend their faith in the post-apostolic eras of church history. Stated differently, it will be argued that a Christian's approach to apologetics and evangelism should be directly impacted by the finality of the New Covenant, the closing of the biblical canon, and the cessation of normative special revelation. While there are a plethora of conceivable ways to survey how these convictions intersect with one another, this thesis will be drawn to a close by exploring three prominent touchpoints in the forthcoming pages.

Christian Apologetics and Evangelism Should Have a Covenantal *Telos*

Although he was certainly not a follower of Jesus Christ, renowned nineteenth-century psychologist William James (1842–1910) rightly observed that mankind is "fighting for ends or purposes."[10] That is to say, human beings are indelibly marked by a desire to understand the chief function and chief purpose associated with any given *thing*

church will submit itself to the authority of apostolic teaching in the New Testament. At the corporate level, a paradigm for the spiritual leadership of a local church is summarized in Titus 2:15: "These things speak and exhort, and rebuke with all authority" (NASB 1995). The "things" that Paul is instructing Titus to "speak" is the gospel of Jesus Christ described in Titus 2:11–14, as well as the specifics of how a biblical church should function in vv. 1–10. Since Titus was a pastor receiving this instruction from Paul, it can be rightly said that the spiritual leadership of biblical churches are called to make disciples through the proclamation of the gospel, and they are to teach those who become disciples to observe all that Christ has commanded. Additionally, the New Testament portrays lay Christians having a role to play in the Great Commission. Texts like 1 Pet 3:15 underscore that *all* Christians are to "always [be] ready to make a defense to everyone who asks [them] to give an account for the hope that is in [them]" (NASB 1995). In addition to defending the truths of the Christian faith from attacks or from errors, this defense will likewise encapsulate the positive content of what Christians believe (i.e., what is in keeping with all that Christ has commanded; Matt 28:20). These observations punctuate why this thesis previously argued that apologetics and evangelism are two sides of the same coin in relationship to the Great Commission—one will naturally engage in both disciplines as he strives to make disciples of all the nations (i.e., meet unbelievers with the gospel of Jesus Christ and the full counsel of God's Word; Matt 28:19). For a robust overview of competing interpretations of the Great Commission mandate, along with a defense of its perpetuity and universality throughout New Covenant history, see Scott Allen Gilbert, "Go Make Disciples: Sermonic Application of the Imperative of the Great Commission" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017).

[10] Van Meter Ames, "William James and Zen," *Psychologia* 2, no. 2 (1959): 115.

in the natural realm.[11] Whether concerning themselves or concerning the rest of the universe, the widespread anthropological pursuit is to ascertain *telos*.[12] One can clearly witness this propensity modeled throughout the universal church, as there have been innumerable efforts to identify the most foundational distinctives for apologetics and evangelism.[13] Nevertheless, on the basis of what this thesis has expounded (especially in chap. 2), the *telos* of articulating and defending the Christian faith must be thoroughly covenantal.[14]

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[11] R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley portray the inherent bent within creatures to accurately perceive their function and purpose within the broader context of reality: "William James defines the human being as a 'fighter for ends.' The robin is also a fighter for ends (worms). The cat is a fighter for ends (the robin). The universe is teeming with fighters for ends. Could purposive creatures be from a being without purpose? Could there be all these fighters for ends and not be a Fighter for Ends? . . . Purpose cannot exist in the presence of nonpurposive or dysteleological events." R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 123–24.

[12] Steven B. Cowan and James S. Spiegel provide the following definition, and subsequent elaboration, of *telos*: "Everything has a telos, a function or purpose. Cups are designed to hold liquid, clocks function to tell time, and boats are made to carry people and things on water." Steven B. Cowan and James S. Spiegel, *The Love of Wisdom: A Christian Introduction to Philosophy* (Nashville: B & H, 2009), 354. They continue, "God made all things for a purpose, and the purposes for things define their specific goods. This includes human beings, who were made in God's image and share in God's rationality" (358).

[13] A noteworthy publication exemplifying the enormity of resources that have been produced to better equip Christians to share and defend their faith is Walter C. Campbell-Jack, Gavin J. McGrath, and C. Stephen Evans, eds., *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2006). In this tome alone, there are over 450 articles/essays devoted to unpacking significant figures and revolutionary ideas that have largely shaped how generations of Christians have sought to earnestly contend for their faith.

[14] Much of what K. Scott Oliphint argues shares continuity with what is outlined throughout chap. 5 of the thesis. Consequently, Oliphint's comments on are especially helpful in explaining why Christian apologetics (and evangelism) should have a covenantal *telos*:

> In creating man, God voluntarily determined, at the same time, to establish a relationship with him. That relationship is properly designated a *covenant*. . . . This has sweeping implications for apologetics. Given that all men are in covenant relationship to God, they are bound by that relationship to "owe obedience unto Him as their Creator." That obligation of obedience comes by virtue of our being created—we were created as covenant beings. (K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles and Practice in Defense of Our Faith* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013], 41)

Oliphint continues,

> But since the fall . . . we are at war with our true identity. Always and everywhere in covenant relationship with God our Creator, we seek the utterly impossible and unobtainable; we seek autonomy. If this is really the way things are since the fall, then the apologetic task is always, or at least *should*

Insofar covenant mediates special revelation from God to man, believers cannot divorce the *act* of speaking as an ambassador of God's kingdom from covenant.[15] When Scripture is rightly proclaimed by followers of Jesus Christ, it is none other than God's covenantal revelation being unveiled by his covenant people.[16] Moreover, insofar covenant situates humanity along God's redemptive-historical timeline, believers cannot divorce the *context* of speaking as an ambassador of God's kingdom from covenant.[17] There is never a conceivable moment in which man is not under at least one of the divine-human covenants that have been enacted.[18]

> always be, set within and controlled by that covenant relationship which is a universal condition of every person. (45)

[15] For a review of how this thesis propounded the way covenant mediates special revelation from God to man, consider what is recorded on pp. 54–55.

[16] In the nineteenth century essay entitled "Atonement and the Covenant of Grace," Hugh Martin (1821–1885) helpfully elucidates the interconnection between a New Covenant Christian's status as an ambassador of God's kingdom, and a New Covenant Christian's role as a herald of God's covenantal revelation being expressed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ:

> When Christ, by His ambassadors, and in His instituted ordinances, gives forth the gospel call, it is a glorious exercise of His kingly office. But Christ executes His kingly office by covenant. The exercise of His kingly office cannot possibly be placed on any wider, broader, more gracious foundation than the Covenant of Grace. Not any more, therefore, can the gospel call. For, as we have said, the solitary thing which [the gospel call] takes for granted is that sinners are not inside—not yet interested in—this blessed covenant or constitution; that they are aliens from the blessed kingdom of which it is the charter. [The gospel call] is, therefore, in its essential nature obviously a universal call. It is so because it is a call to the covenant. What possible contradiction or want of harmony can there be between this and the fact that the [gospel] call comes from within the covenant. . . . The [gospel] call itself is destroyed in all the intrinsic worth and in all the professed design of it, as a call to the Covenant, and to all its free grace and sure and saving blessings, if it be a call coming from any quarter but the Covenant itself—be it even from Christ, if it be not from Christ as the covenant-head. It is in fact simply impossible to regard [the gospel call] as resting on any grounds, or as based on any considerations, save those which the Covenant embraces. (Hugh Martin, "Atonement and the Covenant of Grace," *Reformed Perspectives Magazine*, January 7, 2007, https://reformedperspectives.org/magazine/article.asp/link/http:^^reformedperspectives.org^articles^hug_martin^hug_martin.AtonementCOG.html/at/Atonement%20and%20the%20Covenant%20of%20Grace

[17] For a review of how this thesis has explored the way covenant situates mankind along the redemptive-historical timeline, consider what is transcribed on p. 56.

[18] Pp. 56–76 of this thesis describes each of the divine-human covenants found in Scripture, along with how mankind has related to each of those covenants in the progression of redemptive history. J. V. Fesko aptly corroborates these observations while pointedly stressing the inseparability between man's existence as a divine image bearer and man's covenantal relationship to God: "God created humanity within a covenantal context, which means that covenant characterizes created reality, humanity's ontology, and

As God's people further apprehend these factors, they should grow more convinced that articulating and defending their faith must present sinners with an opportunity for self-examination.[19] Individuals who ask or challenge Christians about why they believe what they believe should not leave the conversation without having considered (1) how they have responded to God's covenantal revelation and (2) what covenant(s) they presently reside under in relationship to God.[20] In the event that an inquirer is shown to be unconverted, their desperate and hopeless spiritual state should inevitably propel the Christian into a robustly covenantal dialogue.[21] While there is by no means a one size fits all approach to how the people of God can employ a covenantal witness to their faith, a distinctively Christian apologetic should feature an emphasis on the ethical and eschatological antithesis between regenerate and unregenerate man.[22]

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epistemology." J. V. Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics: Retrieving the Classic Reformed Approach to Defending the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 195–203.

[19] The objective of utilizing apologetics and evangelism to press the interlocutor to self-examination is emphasized by William Edgar: "When we attempt to argue for the Christian faith with unbelievers we are not talking to those for whom God's existence is strange or exotic. When we come to people with the claims of the truth, we are appealing to what they know but deny. We are asking them to be like the prodigal son and come to themselves." William Edgar, *Reasons of the Heart: Recovering Christian Persuasion* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 54.

[20] Although his underlying covenant theology is reflective of the Westminster Standards, Thom E. Notaro rightly expounds how the defense of Christianity must leave the challenger/questioner to grapple with their personal relationship to God via covenant, and their personal response to God's covenantal revelation. Consider the following excerpt from his chapter:

> Though apologetics is ostensibly an encounter between believer and unbeliever, it is more importantly an encounter between covenant Lord and covenant-breaker. The object of apologetics is to reintroduce people to the God they refuse to see, in places they refuse to see him. We live and move and have our being not in a random, impersonal environment. . . . Apologetics is about inviting people to look into the face of this absolute, personal God. It dares them to see him for who he is and what he means for the world. It calls them to meet the Creator and covenant Lord on his holy and gracious terms. (Thom E. Notaro, "A Confessional Apologetic" in *Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint and Lane G. Tipton [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007], 157)

[21] An example of how Christians can model a repletely covenantal witness to their unbelieving neighbors is teased out in Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, ed. William Edgar, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 62–63.

[22] The concepts of ethical antithesis and eschatological antithesis, as developed in this section of the thesis, are likewise explored in Greg L. Bahnsen, "Worldviews in Collision: At War with the World"

Ethically speaking, all unbelievers in a postlapsarian world stand before God as image bearers who are in rebellion to their holy Creator (Rom 3:23; 8:7–8).[23] The unbeliever is not neutral toward the general truths God has disclosed to them in nature and in Scripture, nor is the unbeliever indifferent toward the narrow truths proclaimed in the gospel message (Matt 12:22–32; 1 Cor 2:14).[24] Whereas believers (imperfectly) desire and strive to glorify God with every faculty of their being, unbelievers—religious as they may *appear* to be—do not share this commitment because they will not surrender themselves to God's right to rule over them as Lord (Isa 29:13–16; Rom 10:3–4).[25] Until the unbeliever is willing to repent of their spiritual rebellion against God and renounce their sinful quest for personal autonomy, the aforementioned ethical antithesis will perpetually remain (Ezek 37:1–10; Eph 2:1–10).[26] Upon highlighting these factors, the table is effectively set

(lecture, Westminster Theological Seminary, January 1, 1988), https://reformed.org/apologetics/at-war-with-the-word-the-necessity-of-biblical-antithesis-by-greg-l-bahnsen/.

[23] The stipulations affixed to the Covenant of Works, along with the ensuing ramifications for mankind after Adam's failure to adhere thereto, are detailed on pp. 50–53 of this thesis. Additionally, a clarifying treatment of the interconnection between covenant, ethics, and man's existence as an image bearer of God in a fallen world can be obtained in John M. Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2015), 63–64, 100–110.

[24] The idea that unbelievers can engage with divine truth from a posture of neutrality is categorically refuted by John M. Frame: "The point is not that unbelievers are simply ignorant of the truth. Rather, God has revealed himself to each person with unmistakable clarity, both in creation (Ps. 19; Rom. 1:18–21) and in man's own nature (Gen. 1:26ff). At some level of his consciousness or unconsciousness, that knowledge remains. But in spite of that knowledge, the unbeliever intentionally distorts the truth, exchanging it for a lie." John M. Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God: An Introduction* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1994), 7–8.

[25] The antithetical heart motives and the antithetical lifestyle patterns that differentiate believers from unbelievers is the tangible outworking of their antithetical spiritual conditions. Whereas Christians will (imperfectly) orient themselves under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, non-Christians will not do so. John Murray helpfully juxtaposes how regenerate and unregenerate sinners conduct themselves in light of God's absolute authority throughout his chapter on "The Fear of God," in *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 229–42.

[26] Given the spiritual deadness of fallen man, the only way a natural descendant of Adam will exercise repentance and faith in Jesus Christ is if God first gives them the grace to do so. Thus, the axiom *regeneration precedes faith* is absolutely true with respect to how *any* hell-bound sinner can be saved. Since an exhaustive treatment of the relationship between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility in salvation is outside the scope of this chapter, the reader is encouraged to consult James R. White, *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary, 2000), 75–133

for delving into the deeper covenantal implications that are linked to the eschatological antithesis between regenerate and unregenerate sinners.

Eschatologically speaking, unbelievers stand before God as condemned to eternity in hell by virtue of having Adam as their covenant head (Rom 5:12–14, 15a, 16a, 17a, 18a, 19a; 1 Cor 15:21a, 22a), and by virtue of the actual sins they commit in this life (Rom 6:23; Col 3:5–7).[27] On the other hand, all believers in a postlapsarian world stand before God as heirs to eternity in heaven by virtue of having Jesus Christ as their covenant head (Rom 5:15b, 16b, 17b, 18b, 19b; 1 Cor 15:21b, 22b), and by virtue of being credited with Christ's life of perfect righteousness (Rom 4:3–7; 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 3:18a).[28] Despite being guilty of original sin in Adam and of actual sins committed in their earthly lives, every believer is transferred under the covenant headship of Jesus Christ at the moment of their justification, resulting in eternal absolution from the condemnation they deserve to receive from God (Rom 5:1; 8:1; Heb 8:12; 1 John 1:9).[29]

In summation, since God's perspective on the unbeliever's current spiritual state and future destination will always be tied to covenant, a covenantal *telos* must necessarily underlie a believer's effort to contend for the faith. God's people should resolve themselves to proclaim that the only hope for sinners to experience the fullness of spiritual life on this

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[27] The interconnectedness between an unbeliever residing under the covenant headship of Adam, and their eschatological destination barring conversion, is explained in this thesis's treatment of the Covenant of Works on pp. 51–53.

[28] The direct link between a believer residing under the covenant headship of Jesus Christ and their eschatological destination is surveyed in this thesis's commentary on the New Covenant (Covenant of Grace) throughout pp. 72–75.

[29] In the centuries subsequent to the Protestant Reformation, there have been many efforts to delineate the concepts of *original sin* and *actual sin*. Petrus van Mastricht offers the following succinct definitions: "[Original sin] is so called, first because it has its origin in the first man, and in his first sin, then because it has its origin with our origin, and then because it is the origin of every actual transgression." Petrus van Mastricht, *The Works of God and the Fall of Man*, vol. 3 of *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Todd M. Rester (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2021), 3:450–51. "[Actual sin] is in point of fact nothing except the deviation of human action from the law of God" (492). Beyond these terse portrayals, van Mastricht also offers a broader overview of *original sin* and *actual sin* (443–518). For a brief and specifically Particular Baptist synopsis of the distinction between *original sin* and *actual sin*, see question and answer 21 in Paul Cox, *The Illustrated Baptist Catechism* (Janesville, WI: RefToons, 2021), 34.

side of eternity—and to escape an eternity in hell—is if their relationship to the thrice holy Creator experiences a radical transformation. Namely, those who naturally reside under Adam's covenant headship must come under the covenant headship of Jesus Christ through repentance and faith alone. While such a drastic change can only be accomplished by God's sovereign enablement, believers should be motivated to graciously evangelize the lost—and to defend the faith against unbelief—as opportunities arise. Through the lens of covenant, Christians must tirelessly champion the present ethical antithesis between themselves and their non-Christian neighbors as the paradigm for the eschatological antithesis that awaits in the age to come.

Christian Apologetics and Evangelism Should Prioritize Canonical Authority

In accordance with God's infinitely wise and holy providence, the culmination of his covenantal revelation to humanity is codified in the sixty six books of the Old and New Testaments.[30] This array of documents do not exhaust all that God has ever said to his image bearers, nor do they comprehensively reveal all that God knows about reality (Prov 25:2; Rev 10:4).[31] Nevertheless, the biblical canon is the only inerrant, inspired, and infallible commentary on how the creator-creature relationship can be perceived throughout redemptive history (Prov 30:5; John 10:34–35).[32] As such, if Christian apologetics and

[30] Pp. 84–107 of this thesis unfold the process whereby the Old and New Testaments were formed, in addition to why the Apocryphal literature should not be regarded as canonical. Subsequently, the connection between God's covenantal revelation and the biblical canon is expounded throughout pp. 108–16.

[31] The finite nature of God's *ad extra* revelatory purposes is tersely delineated by K. Scott Oliphint: "We know God only inasmuch as He has revealed Himself to us [in general and special revelation]. Given that revelation, we know something of His character as He stoops to interact with His creation." K. Scott Oliphint, *Reasons for Faith: Philosophy in the Service of Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2006), 341.

[32] Regardless of one's agreement or disagreement with the finer intricacies of his apologetic methodology, Bible believing Christians ought to be able to champion Norman L. Geisler's affirmation of Scripture's unique ability to provide an inerrant, inspired, and infallible commentary on how image bearers can live *coram Deo*:

> The Bible is the divinely authoritative Word of God, the basis for all faith and practice (2 Tim. 3:16–17). . . . The Bible and the Bible alone contains the doctrinal and ethical truth God has revealed to mankind. And the Bible alone is the written canon or norm of all truth. All other alleged truth must

evangelism are going to be marked by a covenantal *telos*, then both disciplines should likewise be governed by the literature that explicates God's covenantal revelation to man (i.e., Scripture).[33]

The special revelation that God has chosen to preserve in Scripture should not only be prioritized when a believer seeks to understand their existence in the universe, but it should also be prioritized by the Christian who seeks to defend or share their faith.[34] Once these specific convictions are embraced, believers will not merely long for unregenerate sinners to be saved, but will rather yearn to see them submitted to the full counsel of holy writ (Titus 2:10–14; 2 Pet 3:18). [35] Upon operating from this perspective, biblical authority is safeguarded as Christians set forth a holistic contention for their faith (2 Tim 2:25; Jude 1:3).[36]

> be brought to the bar of Holy Scripture to be tested. The Bible and the Bible alone has been confirmed by God through Christ to be his infallible Word. (Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013], 448)

[33] John M. Frame lucidly explores the covenantal nature of God's revelation to his image bearers, and the practical implications thereof. John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1987), 40–48.

[34] While there is often great value in citing extrabiblical evidences as attestation to the truthfulness of Christianity, this thesis argues that Scripture should be the Christian's epistemological starting place—as well as the *norma normans non normata* (i.e., the norm of norms that is not normed)—for defending and sharing their faith. Vern S. Poythress espouses a similar persuasion in *Redeeming Philosophy: A God-Centered Approach to the Big Questions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 20–33. In contrast to the approach modeled by unbelievers, Poythress stresses that Christians should desire for a biblically informed worldview to direct their engagements in the public square and to shape how they interact with extrabiblical material.

[35] Although the Great Commission mandate encompasses the desire to see lost and perishing sinners converted, the calling of God's people is to see those who profess faith in Jesus Christ undergo a lifelong process of discipleship. Robert E. Coleman highlights, "The Great Commission is not merely to go to the ends of the earth preaching the gospel (Mark 16:15), nor to baptize a lot of converts into the name of the triune God, nor to teach them the precepts of Christ, but to 'make disciples.'" Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Spire, 2010), 104.

[36] By virtue of the Christian faith being a collective assortment of beliefs, it must necessarily be proclaimed as a comprehensive system of truth. These assertions are echoed by Cornelius Van Til: "Christian theism stands before us as a unit. It offers to men the conception of God the Creator and Redeemer as the ultimate category of interpretation of every fact of the world. It claims that no fact is intelligible unless seen in relation to central creating-redeeming activity of God as Creator and Redeemer." Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Theistic Evidences*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2016), 94.

The importance of Christians giving a robust account for the hope that is in them cannot be overstated (1 Pet 3:15). Since truth is always a harmonious unit—and since all truth is God's truth—a believer's apologetical and evangelistic efforts should focus on highlighting Scripture's compatibility with the world at large.[37] As the creator and sustainer of all things, what God has disclosed in special revelation never contradicts what he has been pleased to unveil in general revelation.[38] The former simply builds on and clarifies the latter, so Christians can engage in their witnessing endeavors with the presupposition that every fact in reality will be consistent with the written Word of God.[39] Consequently, the people of God should present their faith as a collective system of truth rooted in biblical

[37] The byproduct of believing that all truth in general and special revelation will be a harmonious thread should drive Christians to show their non-Christian peers the Bible's inherent consistency from Genesis to Revelation, along with the Bible's timeless relevance to human beings in a fallen world. Van Til's argumentation is helpful:

> The God of which the Scriptures speak is the God who makes the facts to be what they are. There can therefore be no fact which is ultimately out of accord with the system of truth set forth in Scripture. Every fact in the universe is what it is just because of the place that it has in this system. . . . The Christian holds to the authority and finality of the Bible not because he can clearly, that is exhaustively, show the coherence of every fact [in the universe] with every other fact of Scripture. He rather holds to this doctrine of Scripture because, unless he does, there is no resting point for the search of facts anywhere. (Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint [Glenside, PA: Westminster Seminary, 2023], 27–28)

[38] David W. Diehl calls to attention the continuity of discernible truth in general and special revelation, as well as the importance of not esteeming the latter at the expense of the former in his article, "Evangelicalism and General Revelation: An Unfinished Agenda," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30, no. 4 (December 1987): 441–55, see especially 445, 448.

[39] Against the backdrop of general revelation, Paul K. Helseth underscores the clarifying and supplementary nature of special revelation:

> Christians zealously pursue truth in every sphere because they recognize that the Word of God is not a substitute for general revelation, but only a preparation for its proper assimilation. Special revelation was not given, they maintain, to supplant a strictly natural knowledge [of God] by a strictly supernatural knowledge, but so that the general revelation of God may be reflected purely in minds which now are blinded to its reflection by sin. (Paul K. Helseth, *"Right Reason" and the Princeton Mind: An Unorthodox Proposal* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2010], 86)

Helseth continues, "True interpretations of reality—indeed the best interpretations of reality—are possible only when general revelation is looked at through the spectacles of special revelation" (97).

authority, with the aim of providing mankind with the most cogent interpretation of reality.[40]

Under the chief authority of Scripture, Christians are able to offer an objective explanation as to why reality is the way it is for regenerate and unregenerate sinners alike.[41] Through the biblical categories of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration, believers can provide a macrolevel account for man's purpose in the universe that is unlike any other philosophy or religion.[42] Furthermore, the written Word of God establishes a microlevel foundation for every person's intelligible experience in this world.[43] Why do Christians and non-Christians presuppose things like the ability to engage in reasonable discourse, the reliability of human sense perception, the uniformity of nature, or the perpetuity of moral

[40] A charge for believers to set forth a holistic presentation of their faith to an unbelieving world, under the supreme authority of Scripture, is given by Greg L. Bahnsen: "The Christian takes *revelational authority* as his *starting point and controlling factor* in all reasoning. . . . Upon the platform of God's revealed truth, the believer can authoritatively declare the riches of [God's] knowledge." Greg L. Bahnsen, *Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith*, ed. Robert R. Booth (Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media, 2011), 253.

[41] Over the centuries, confusion and debate have abounded on the question of how believers and unbelievers can live in the same world—and even seemingly share many commonalities—yet reach immensely different conclusions about the all-encompassing nature of reality. As explicated by Cornelius Van Til, who distinguishes the metaphysical continuity from the epistemological discontinuity between Christians and non-Christians. Whereas all men share metaphysical common ground by virtue of being created in God's image and residing in God's creation, there is an epistemological antithesis between regenerate and unregenerate sinners. Only those who submit to the authority of Scripture and consequently align their worldview with Scripture will ascertain a proper view of God's created order. Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2015), 3–19.Thus, Van Til states, "We as Christians alone have a position [i.e., perception of reality] that is philosophically defensible" (14).

[42] The uniqueness of Christianity is punctuated by the metanarrative of Scripture (i.e., creation, fall, redemption, and restoration), which enables the believer to explain some of life's biggest questions in a way that is unlike any other ideology. For a brief and helpful publication devoted to exploring the antecedent implications, see Steven Garber, "The Story That Makes Sense of All Stories," *Knowing & Doing* 5, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 1–3.

[43] Within the context of a hypothetical conversation between an atheist and a Christian, Oliphint articulates how the foundation of man's intelligible experience is formulated by the authority and truth of Scripture: "As the 'measuring rod,' Scripture sets the parameters within which we live and think. It does not destroy or essentially alter the world; it only guides our understanding of it." Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics*, 187.

absolutes?[44] Definitive and satisfactory explanations for each of the aforementioned realities are found by turning to the comprehensive teaching of Scripture.[45]

The Bible establishes a universal and unchanging basis for why it is possible for human beings to engage in rational discourse (Col 2:3; 2 Tim 2:13).[46] That is to say, mankind cannot reason or embark upon intellectual exchanges without employing the laws of logic that the Creator has entrenched into reality.[47] Additionally, the Bible states that every person will have to give an account to Jesus Christ for how they lived during their time on the Earth (Rom 14:12; 2 Cor 5:10).[48] Doctrines such as the Final Judgment confirm that human sense perception must be largely dependable lest such an account be reduced

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[44] Each of the categories cited in the sentence corresponding with this footnote are further elaborated in Jason Lisle, "Young Earth Presuppositionalism," *Christian Apologetics Journal* 11, no. 2 (2013): 63–83. Within the context of the same journal issue, Lisle also reiterates the preconditions of intelligibility in his entries "Presuppositional Response" (33–44) and "Presuppositional Reply" (109–14).

[45] As noted, the questions that immediately precede this sentence touch on some of the preconditions of intelligibility. A repeated contention in this thesis is that the preconditions of intelligibility can be objectively accounted for in biblical Christianity. For a working definition of the preconditions of intelligibility, consider Ken Ham and Bodie Hodge's words: "Preconditions of intelligibility (knowledge) are the things that need to be in place for knowledge to exist." Ken Ham and Bodie Hodge, "What Is Apologetics—and Why Do It?," in *How Do We Know the Bible Is True?*, ed. Ken Ham and Bodie Hodge (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2012), 2:144. Laws of logic, uniformity in nature, and morality are among the cited preconditions of intelligibility in Ham and Hodge's chapter.

[46] Although originally written to satisfy an assignment for a Professional Doctoral Studies seminar at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (80342 Contemporary Issues in Apologetics), the following article specifically focuses on the relationship between laws of logic and Christianity: Dewey Dovel, "Laws of Logic and Christianity," Covenant Confessions, July 15, 2022, https://covenantconfessions.com/laws-of-logic-and-christianity%EF%BF%BC/.

[47] Douglas Groothuis endorses a prevailing Christian conception of the laws of logic: "[The laws of logic are] a truth of all creation. God ordained us to think in this way because the world operates this way. Despite what some theologians have claimed, Christian faith does not require that we somehow transcend this law (or any law) of logic." Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2022), 37.

[48] Despite being originally written to satisfy an assignment for a Professional Doctoral Studies seminar at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (80342 Contemporary Issues in Apologetics), the following article specifically focuses on the relationship between the reliability of human sense perception and Christianity: Dewey Dovel, "Evaluating Human Sense Perception Though a Christian Lens," Covenant Confessions, July 18, 2022, https://covenantconfessions.com/evaluating-human-sense-perception-though-a-christian-lens%EF%BF%BC/.

to absurdity or futility.[49] The Bible also teaches that God upholds and sustains all things in the universe by the word of his power (Neh 9:6; Heb 1:3).[50] As such, there is warrant in presupposing that the created order will continue to function with general predictability and regularity until the Last Day (Gen 8:21–9:17; 2 Pet 3:3–9).[51] There is likewise biblical grounds for the moral absolutes that are widely espoused across ethnic, spatial, and temporal barriers.[52] Man's vast disdain for atrocities such as deception, murder, and theft is rooted in the fact that he knows God's standard of morality at the level of conscience; this is a necessary entailment of bearing the image of God (Gen 1:26–27; Rom 2:14–15).[53]

While many other components of reality have their meaning and significance concretized by the Word of God, Christians need not fret over having to memorize an

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[49] For a survey of some of John Calvin's efforts to identify how the reliability of human sense perception correlates with man's ability to contemplate the temporal and eternal trajectory of his life, see Matthew A. LaPine, *The Logic of the Body: Retrieving Theological Psychology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020), 161–64.

[50] While the following article was originally written to satisfy an assignment for a Professional Doctoral Studies seminar at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (80342 Contemporary Issues in Apologetics), it offers a substantive overview of how nature's uniformity relates to Christianity: Dewey Dovel, "Toothpaste and Truth: A Primer on the Uniformity of Nature," Covenant Confessions, July 18, 2022, https://covenantconfessions.com/toothpaste-and-truth-a-primer-on-the-uniformity-of-nature%EF%BF%BC/.

[51] Jonathan D. Sarfati directly links the uniformity of nature to the Noahic Covenant in *The Genesis Account: A Theological, Historical, and Scientific Commentary on Genesis 1-11*, 4th ed. (Powder Springs, GA: Creation Book, 2021), 593–95. Furthermore, Timothy Keller argues that the natural realm's observable regularity is a powerful argument for the truthfulness of Christianity in his renowned volume, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Penguin, 2018), 136–37.

[52] The following article was originally written to satisfy an assignment for a Professional Doctoral Studies seminar at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (80342 Contemporary Issues in Apologetics), and it touches on the connection between moral absolutes and Christianity: Dewey Dovel, "Moral Absolutes, the Law of God, and the Imago Dei," Covenant Confessions, July 30, 2022, https://covenantconfessions.com/moral-absolutes-the-law-of-god-and-the-imago-dei-%EF%BF%BC/.

[53] At the turn of 2019, the results of the largest and most comprehensive cross-cultural study of (human) morals ever conducted were released by prominent anthropologists at the University of Oxford. Upon engaging with over 600 ethnographic resources across the span of 60 civilized societies in the world, this research enterprise found seven moral rules pervading each of the groups that were surveyed. A viable case can be made that five of those seven norms are consistent with what is transcribed in the second table of the Decalogue. See Oliver Scott Curry, Daniel Austin Mullins, and Harvey Whitehouse, "Is It Good to Cooperate? Testing the Theory of Morality-as-Cooperation in 60 Societies," *Current Anthropology* 60, no. 1 (February 2019): 47–69.

encyclopedic amount of facts. Given the all-encompassing scope of the preceding examples, Christians will find it sufficient for their apologetic and evangelistic efforts to merely demonstrate how the most foundational aspects of human experience are solidified by Scripture. Insofar it can be shown that a person cannot function in life apart from assuming basic biblical truths (whether knowingly or unknowingly), the authority of God's covenantal revelation—as expressed in the Old and New Testaments—is powerfully substantiated. Therefore, when presented with opportunities to defend or share their faith, believers should ensure that their approach never deviates from a prioritization of canonical authority. As the people of God zealously champion God's Word as their ultimate standard for faith and practice, they should graciously summon unbelievers to follow suit.

Christian Apologetics and Evangelism Should Be Conducted with Courageous Contentment

It is often a joyful privilege for followers of Jesus Christ to answer questions about what they believe, or to proactively share their faith when presented with opportunities to do so.[54] Yet there are also times in which a zeal to see lost sinners converted, and embracing the comprehensive testimony of God's Word, can potentially traverse into despair if conversations do not bear any perceivable fruit.[55] Moreover, as Western culture becomes increasingly hostile to Christianity, the fear of persecution can tempt God's people to grow less and less vocal in their public witness.[56] If believers are

[54] The weighty honor and responsibility of witnessing to one's Christian faith, specifically with a focus on caring for the soul of the unbeliever, is delineated in James K. Beilby, *Thinking about Christian Apologetics: What It Is and Why We Do It* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 175–79.

[55] In *Humble Apologetics*, John G. Stackhouse honestly identifies the difficult balance for Christians to strike between desiring to see an unconverted sinner saved and recognizing that believers cannot ultimately change the spiritual condition of any person. Stackhouse helpfully encourages the Christian reader to shift their focus on being faithful to what Scripture calls them to do in their Great Commission stewardship, and to entrust the outcome to the purposes of God. John G. Stackhouse, *Humble Apologetics: Defending the Faith Today* (New York: Oxford University, 2006), 81–85.

[56] As recently as 2018, a study conducted by Barna Research discovered that 44 percent of the self-identifying Christians who were surveyed would not share their faith with an unbelieving friend if they knew it would lead to some form of rejection. If this is true of how believers would approach vocalizing

to remain unscathed by these potential pitfalls in their stewardship of the Great Commission, they must necessarily be characterized by courage and contentment.

While a surplus of advice could be offered to cultivate these respective virtues, one practical method is for followers of Jesus Christ to embrace a proper perspective on the finality of God's covenantal revelation to man in Scripture; that is to say, the biblical canon is the consummate compilation of God's special revelation to humanity.[57] Until the Last Day, the only normative standard for Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy is what has been explicitly stated—or by necessary inference contained—in the Holy Scriptures.[58] Therefore, a recognition of the Old and New Testament's sufficiency for every good work should—first and foremost—generate growing measures of contentment in whatever materializes from a believer's apologetical or evangelistic pursuits.[59]

In striving to model an attitude of contentment while going through highs and lows in a fallen world, Christians must regularly remind themselves of God's absolute

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their faith with non-Christian friends, how much more so would there be hesitancy for Christians to share with unbelievers they did not already have an established relationship with? The aforementioned Barna study can be accessed here: David Kinnaman, Brooke Hempell, and Roxanne Stone, "Sharing Faith Is Increasingly Optional to Christians," Barna Group, May 15, 2018, https://www.barna.com/research/sharing-faith-increasingly-optional-christians/.

[57] Pp. 154–55 of this thesis explain the interconnectedness between the lack of future divine-human covenants (i.e., the New Covenant is the final covenant epoch of redemptive history), the completed canon of Scripture (i.e., the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament), and the ensuing lack of *normative* post-apostolic revelation (i.e., God's covenantal revelation in the biblical canon is the only binding authority on the universal church until Christ returns).

[58] The phraseology "explicitly stated or by necessary inference contained" is derived from the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith in Modern English, "Chapter 1–The Holy Scriptures," Founders Ministries, accessed September 12, 2023, https://founders.org/library/chapter-1-the-holy-scriptures/, para. 6.

[59] As a Christian virtue, contentment is something that will be progressively cultivated in a believer as they are further sanctified through life in a fallen world (e.g., Paul signifies that contentment is an attitude that must be *learned*; cf. Phil 4:9–13). Thus, believers should progressively grow more content in the outcome of their apologetical/evangelistic endeavors as they behold how God uses the all-sufficient testimony of Scripture to draw elect sinners to himself at the appointed time. Since it is God who saves whom he pleases—and when he pleases—through the hospel message revealed in Scripture, believers can come to learn contentment in whatever outcome stems from their witnessing efforts.

sovereignty (1 Sam 2:6–8; 1 Tim 6:15–16).[60] Once a believer begins to discern the implications of God declaring the end from the beginning, they will ascertain that salvation is exclusively a gift of divine grace (Isa 48:9–11; Rom 11:6).[61] Followers of Jesus Christ certainly have a responsibility to proclaim the only message given under heaven whereby sinners can be reconciled to God, and the high king of heaven certainly uses those efforts as a means to save his elect (Isa 6:8–13; Rom 10:14–16).[62] Yet in the final analysis, apart from God's sovereign blessing, there is nothing any believer can do in and of themselves to bring a hell-bound sinner to saving faith (Isa 43:11–13; Acts 4:12); it is God's power alone, working through his all-sufficient Word, that causes spiritually dead sinners to undergo new birth (Jer 15:16; Rom 10:17).[63] Therefore, Christians can seek to present their neighbors with the full counsel of God's Word without any self-imposed pressure or

[60] The paragraph containing this footnote was modified from portions of an article written by the author of this thesis. See Dewey Dovel, "5 Presuppositions of Apologetics," Covenant Baptist Theological Seminary, May 1, 2023, https://cbtseminary.org/5-presuppositions-of-apologetics-dewey-dovel/.

[61] A central teaching from Genesis to Revelation is the twofold reality that God is absolutely sovereign in the salvation of sinners, and by necessary consequences, man's salvation must be understood as a monergistic gift of divine grace. Steven J. Lawson demonstrates how the metanarrative of Scripture accentuates this reality of *sola gratia* in *Foundations of Grace* (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust, 2016),

[62] John Owen concretizes the relationship between God's eternal decree and God's utilization of means to bring his decree to fruition in time:

> In [God's] infinite Wisdom Ends and Means lye before him in one Vein; and fall together under his unalterable Determination. Two things therefore may be considered in the Wisdom of God giving Immutability to his Counsel concerning the Salvation of the Elect by Jesus Christ. Thereby he saw at once not only whatever was needful for the Accomplishing of it, but that which would infallibly effect it. He chose not probable and likely means for it, and such as might do it, unless some great obstruction did arise, such as whose efficacy might be suspended on any conditions and emergencies; but such as should infallibly and inevitably each the End intended. (John Owen, quoted in James M. Renihan, *To the Judicious and Impartial Reader: An Exposition of the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith* [Cape Coral, FL: Founders Ministries, 2022], 120)

[63] Only God has the power to save spiritually dead sinners as he uses the testimony of his written Word to regenerate them and enable them to exercise saving faith in Jesus Christ (e.g., Rom 10:17; Jas 1:18; 1 Pet 1:23; etc). Daniel R. Hyde succinctly articulates this principle: "What is the means the Holy Spirit uses to convict and convert sinners? His living and active Word." Daniel R. Hyde, *This Is the Word of the Lord: Becoming Confident in the Scriptures* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2022), 118

stress.[64] As the only normative source of special revelation, the Bible is entirely sufficient to save and sanctify all whom the Lord intends.[65]

Additionally, as believers discover an increased contentment in God's power to save sinners through the testimony of his all-sufficient Word, they will come to experience a heightened courage in observing the Great Commission mandate.[66] The book of Acts repeatedly depicts the apostles boldly pointing unconverted Gentile and Jewish masses to the Spirit-inspired truths of God's Word (e.g., Acts 2:17–21, 25–28, 30–31, 34–35; 3:22, 25; 13:22, 33–35, 41).[67] The Gospels and New Testament epistles are also littered with Old Testament references, which indicates an apostolic primacy of directing local churches to the authoritative teaching of canonical literature.[68] Whether in apologetical, discipleship,

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[64] Paul S. Nelson, *Presuppositionalism: A Biblical Approach to Apologetics* (Dublin, CA: FirstLove, 2014), 180.

[65] Since the Bible is clear that God's Word never returns void nor fails to accomplish the purpose for which he allowed it to be declared (Isa 55:10–11), the following statement by Charles Spurgeon holds true when reflecting on how elect and reprobate sinners will ultimately find themselves responding to the message of special revelation: "The same sun which melts wax hardens clay, and the same Gospel which melts some persons to repentance hardens others in their sins." Charles Haddon Spurgeon, "The Lesson of the Almond Tree," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1900), 46:271.

[66] Against the backdrop of experiencing many physical persecutions during his ministry, John Brown of Wamphray powerfully depicts how one can model a contentment in the sufficiency of Scripture and a boldness to contend for the faith while facing hardships. His chapter "How to Make Use of Christ as the Truth When Error Prevails and the Spirit of Error Carries Many Away" is especially pertinent for reviewal. John Brown of Wamphray, *Christ the Way, the Truth, and the Life* (Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria, 2016), 231–44.

[67] Given what is recorded throughout the book of Acts, the observable courage modeled by the apostles—and some of the earliest Christians—is canvassed in William Edgar and K. Scott Oliphint, eds., *To 1500*, vol. 1 of *Christian Apologetics Past & Present: A Primary Source Reader* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 19–24

[68] Based on how the New Testament writers made use of the Old Testament, it would be an understatement to say that they chiefly valued the authoritative instruction set down in God-breathed canonical literature. For example, G. K. Beale notes that "1 out of 22.5 verses in the [New Testament] incorporates a quotation" and that there are anywhere from potentially 600–604,100 Old Testament allusions in the New Testament. G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 30–31. These staggering numbers attest to how the New Testament writers were unashamed to ground much of their doctrinal or practical instruction on the canonical deposit of special revelation (i.e., the Old Testament).

or evangelistic contexts, the leaders of the first-century church were not consumed by a fear of rejection or a fear of how an intended audience might perceive their commitment to special revelation.[69] In the final analysis, the courage exemplified by the earliest Christians was the byproduct of their contentment in Scripture's identity as the normative standard for doctrine and practice.[70] Standing contently on the foundation of God's covenantal literature, as codified in the biblical canon, Christians in every generation can likewise persist in courage as ambassadors for the kingdom of heaven.[71]

Conclusion

Upon reaching the end of this thesis, readers have encountered a case for the cessation of normative post-apostolic revelation. The argumentation was progressively developed through surveying the biblical covenants, the historical formation of canonical literature that attest to those covenants, and the ensuing implications associated with the New Covenant's redemptive-historical finality. In addition to wrestling with these important issues of Christian doctrine, believers who engaged with this thesis have also been confronted with pertinent principles of Great Commission stewardship in the final chapter. With a complete and unchanging source of normative revelation in hand, God's people have an objective basis to go into every corner of the world as a confident contender

[69] W. A. Criswell expounds how the apostles believed that "the great corroboration and attestation and proof of the ministry of [the] Lord [was] found in the Holy Scriptures." W. A. Criswell, *The Bible for Today's World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965), 55. It was upon this architectonic foundation that the earliest Christian leaders labored in their service to Christ, and in their efforts to establish local churches throughout the Roman Empire.

[70] In supplementation to the first century AD, every generation of post-apostolic church history has featured believers who were unwaveringly committed to the *normative* authority of God's Word. To peruse a macrolevel synopsis, see David T. King and William Webster, eds., *Holy Scripture: The Ground and Pillar of Our Faith* (Battle Ground, WA: Christian Resources, 2001), 3:13–152.

[71] Bahnsen offers an ideal balance between contentment in the written (canonical) compilation of God's covenantal revelation and maintaining courage in witnessing for Christ: "[Christians should demonstrate] a humble yet bold presentation of the reason for the hope in us, communicated in terms of the believer's presuppositional commitment to God's true word." Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, 69. May the Lord grant his people with an abundance of grace to be characterized in such a manner.

for the faith, knowing that Scripture's covenantal documents can transform covenant breakers in Adam to covenant keepers in Christ (Isa 44:26; 1 Pet 1:23–25). May the Lord be pleased to use the contents of this thesis to motivate Christian readers to such action. *Soli Deo Gloria*!

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ABSTRACT

COVENANTAL CULMINATION: WHY THE NEW COVENANT DOCUMENTS SIGNIFY THE CESSATION OF NORMATIVE POST-APOSTOLIC REVELATION

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This thesis argues that post-apostolic revelation should not be a normative expectation for New Covenant believers on the basis of the intersection between covenant, canon, and the function of prophecy.

Chapter 1 addresses relevant material to this conversation, revealing the unique need for Baptistic scholarship on this subject. Chapter 2 explains the centrality of covenant for man's eschatological relationship with God in conjunction with its inseparable link to special revelation. After delineating this biblical-theological connection, chapter 3 shows how the biblical canon is the culmination of God's special, covenantal revelation to his people throughout the duration of redemptive history. Chapter 4 shifts focus to the New Covenant and the canonical documents associated with the New Covenant, elucidating God's ordained means of speaking to his people through the first century apostles and prophets. Chapter 5 offers concluding remarks in view of the relevant apologetical, evangelistic, and polemical implications for the broader church.

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